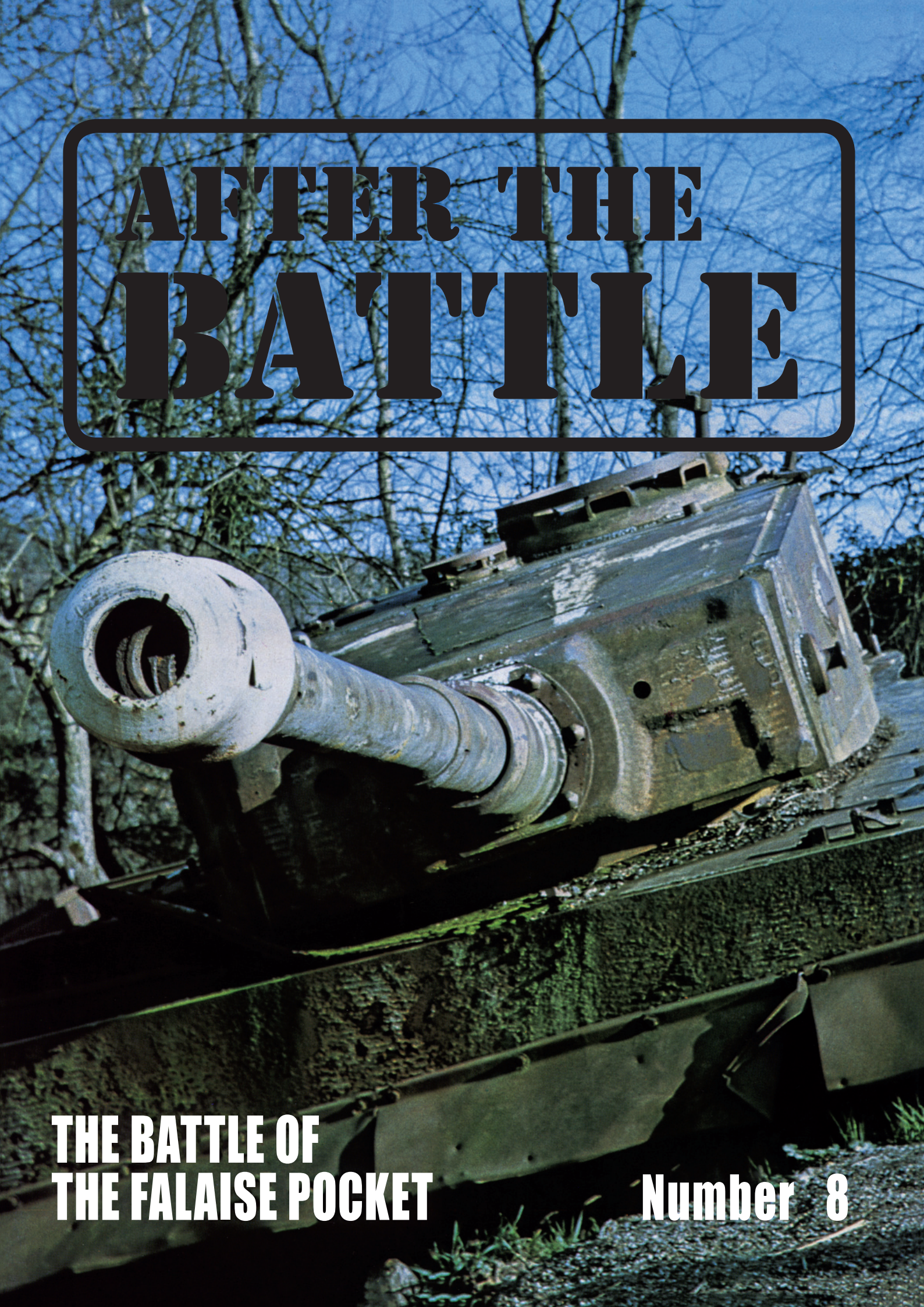
AFTER THE BATTLE



THE BATTLE OF THE FALAISE POCKET

Number 8

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Front Cover: Tiger I still to be seen at the side of the road outside Vimoutiers — a relic of the battle of the Falaise pocket.

Centre Pages: Curtis SB2C-5 Helldiver, registration N92879 of the Confederate Air Force, Harlingen, Texas, operated by Colonel Bob Griffin.

Back Cover: Admiral Yamamoto's G4M 'Betty' in the jungle of Bourgainville (Bruce Adams)

The editor is indebted to the following authors and publishers to quote extracts:

The Aftermath' based on quotations from *The Battle of the Falaise Gap* by Eddy Florentin, Elek Books Ltd.

St. Lambert-sur-Dives, a personal account by Major D. V. Currie, V.C.

Hauptmann Lang's account of Rommel's accident from *Rommel* by Desmond Young, Collins.

The maps on pages 5 and 9 are reproduced from *'Breakout and Pursuit'* by Martin Blumenson by permission of the US Department of the Army.

ISSN: 0306-154X

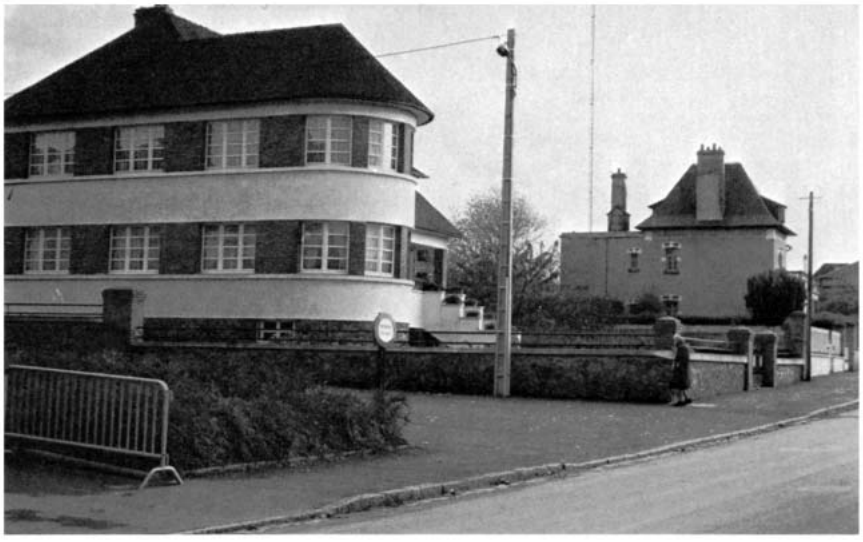
In April 1974, the official ban on the publication of details of British cryptanalysis during World War II was lifted. It resulted in the publication of 'The Ultra Secret' by the head of the department of M16 concerned, F. W. Winterbothom. We know now the incredible extent of British codebreaking; that since 1940 signals between Hitler and his various army commands had been intercepted and deciphered in England and passed to Allied commanders. Naturally this puts a completely different aspect on all that has previously been written about the war and its commanders and, indeed, the ultimate Allied victory!

In this issue of *After the Battle*, Allied codebreaking figures decisively in two of our stories; firstly the reading of signals between Hitler and von Kluge his commander in Normandy), which led to the battle of Falaise and the ultimate destruction of a large part of the German Army. This was probably Ultra's greatest triumph.

Then on the Pacific side, an event which followed the American breaking of the Japanese 'Purple' code machine (technically known to the Japanese as 97-shiki O-bun In-ji-ki)—the bizarre ambush of Admiral Yamamoto.

In July 1945, General Eisenhower wrote to the Chief of the British Secret Service and said that the Ultra codebreaking triumph was 'decisive' in the outcome of the war.

THE BATTLE OF



Top: The Germans took this photograph of the First World War French memorial which stood in the Boulevard Marechal Joffe in Villers-Bocage (Bundesarchiv). Above: The first bombing of the town occurred on the night of D-Day; by the time it was captured on August 4 the town was in ruins — no trace of the memorial can be seen today. Opposite page top: A German motorcyclist is directed to follow a diversion in Lisieux in the Rue Jean d'Arc to reach Falaise via the Avenue Victor Hugo (Bundesarchiv). Right: The Rond Point Hotel still with shrub tubs today.

THE FALAISE POCKET

On August 6, 1944 General Montgomery, Allied Land Forces Commander in Europe, issued a directive to cover the next phase of operations. It defined its intention ' . . . to destroy the enemy forces in that part of France . . .' west of the Seine and north of the Loire rivers. This battle, which was to end in the virtual annihilation and destruction of two German armies, the Fifth Panzer and the Seventh, would be called by future historians: the battle of the Falaise Gap or Pocket.

It is not the editor's intention to write a long treatise on the many stages the battle went through; the various operations which went to make up the whole, like 'Tractable and Totalize'. Or to discuss in detail the many units involved from the six nations taking part:- the Americans, Canadians, British, French, Germans and Poles. Many books have already been written on the subject, and the strategies are well covered in the official histories of Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

'A photograph tells a thousand words' — never was this phrase more true than with the destruction in the Falaise battle. Day by day we will follow the closing of the pocket, photographically, until the last awful pictures in the 'Corridor of Death'. Quotations have been taken from 'The Battle of the Falaise Gap' by Eddy Florentin, a book full and descriptive of the horrors of the fight, typified by its French title; 'Stalingrad en Normandie'.

Sunday, August 6

Caen had fallen to the British on July 9 and St. Lo to the Americans on July 18. On July 25, Operation 'Cobra' on the western flank enabled the US First Army to pierce the German lines, west of St. Lo on the following day; a breakthrough which was later exploited to the full by the US Third Army which swept both west, south, and south-east from Avranches at the beginning of August. German reinforcements had been sent into the area and a counter attack was being prepared by Generalfeldmarschall Gunther von Kluge, Commander in Chief in the West.

At the eastern end of the front that Sunday, the British 43rd Division finally secured Ondefontaine after a night and a day of hard fighting, whilst, at 2.30 p.m., the British 129th Brigade, together with the 13/18th Hussars, started to attack nearby Mont Pincon.

Monday, August 7

The German counter-attack, led by three Panzer Divisions backed up by SS Panzers and Grenadiers, fell on Mortain in the American sector shortly after midnight. To the north, Montchauvet had been taken and, out of the British troops driving south and American forces pressing east to secure the important road centre of Vire, the US 29th Division finally occupied the town by dawn on the 7th, after suffering 1,000 casualties.

Tuesday, August 8

On Tuesday, the action turned to the Canadian front in the north when, during the hours of darkness, 1,020 RAF bombers accurately dropped 3,462 tons of bombs on villages south of the Canadian positions at St. Andre-sur-Orne to commence Operation 'Totalize'—the attack south towards Falaise. The Canadian 2nd Infantry Division attacked down the west of the N158 Caen-Falaise road with the British 51st Highland Infantry Division to the east. The town of Andre-sur-Orne, captured on July 25 after bitter fighting, had to be abandoned, to avoid the danger of bombing Allied troops. Unfortunately, during Phase II of the operation, which started shortly after mid-day, the US Eighth Air Force bombed wildly, as far back as the outskirts of Caen, killing 65 and wounding 250 British, Canadian and Polish troops and wrecking 60 vehicles and guns.

Top: Sergeant Midgley took this photograph of troops searching for snipers in Ondefontaine on August 6 (IWM) with right, our present day comparison.

Left: Sergeant Hardy meanwhile, in nearby Montchauvet, photographed a similar search for snipers during the capture of the village (IWM). Above: An old lady traces the soldier's steps 30 years later.

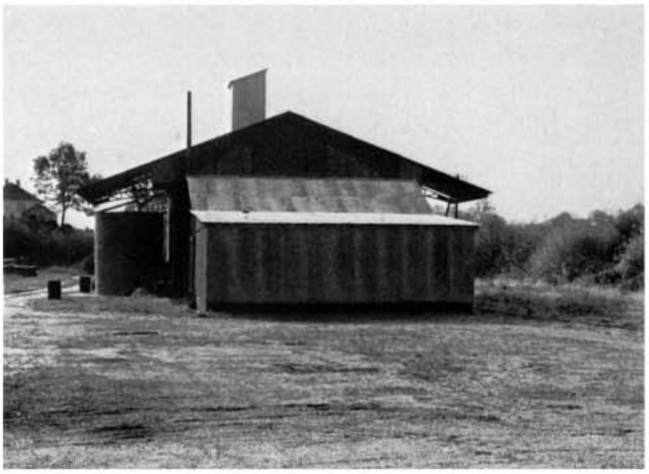
Above: US Signal Corps photographer McHugh recorded this scene in Vire on his Speed Graphic camera on August 8. Troops are moving east along the Rue d'Aignaux; in the background the local cinema (US Army). Right: Today the cinema and trees have gone transforming the crossroads with the Rue des Halles.

Below: On the N177 just north of Vire is the junction between the American and British Armies. US Infantry move south to Vire whilst the British emerging from the N174, turn left. Photo by Sergeant Palmer, August 9 (IWM). Left: We were sorry to learn the intersection had been modernised only two years ago but a comparison is still possible.

Wednesday, August 9

Whilst Operation 'Totalize' continued in the east, the American First Army to the west was steadily attacking and obliterating the salient at Mortain captured by the Germans during their counter-attack. Far to the south the US Third Army pushing eastwards had reached Le Mans. Sensing an opportunity to surround and cut off a large part of the German Armies, with General Montgomery's approval, General Bradley, Commander of the US Twelfth Army Group, decided to turn the American spearhead sharply north, towards Alencon, with the idea of meeting up with the Canadians attacking southwards. The Germans, preoccupied with renewing their attack westwards, were distracted from the impending danger of encirclement. Commanded by Standartenfuhrer Kurt Meyer, the 12th SS Panzer Division, taking a brief rest in reserve near the River Laison (between the Caen-Falaise road and St. Pierre-sur-Dives), was ordered north to block the road to Falaise.

Top: Canadian soldier of Les Fusiliers de Mont-Royal examining a Pzkpfw 5 Panther on the N162 on the outskirts of Andre-sur-Orne, the village which had to be evacuated for Operation 'Totalize'. Note the barely visible sign board behind the tank (Public Archives of Canada). Above: Because of new buildings, an exact comparison is not possible; our picture shows the only original section of railings left further along the road.

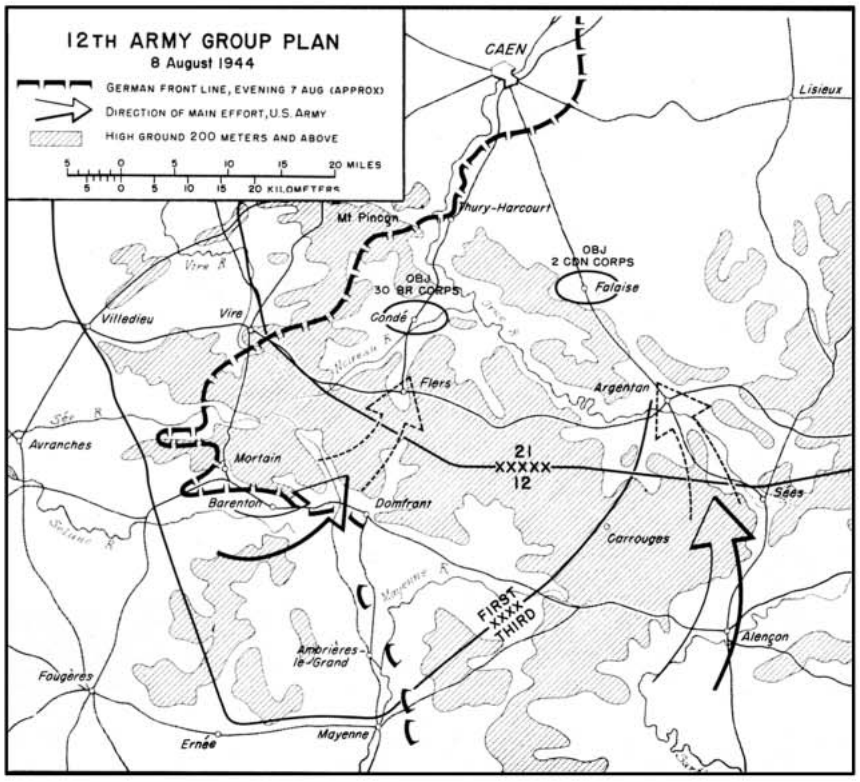


Left: Just north of Vire Sergeant Palmer photographed the wrecked station at La Graverie (IWM). Above: Today this is the end of the line for the railway from Vire.

Thursday, August 10

By Thursday, the momentum of the Canadian attack in the north was fading and General Simonds, Commander of the Canadian 2nd Corps, ordered a new attack that afternoon by the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division starting at 4.00 p.m. They came up against Kurt Meyer's SS units and were driven back — Operation 'Totalize' was at an end.

Meanwhile in the south, the American and French Armoured Divisions of the Third Army XV Corps jumped off and moved about fifteen miles; halfway to Alencon. Riding at the front of this spearhead with the US 5th Armoured Division was the French 2nd Armoured Division, eager to go under the command of Major-General Jacques Leclerc. German units, which were attacked en route, withdrew to the north.



Friday, August 11

By Friday, von Kluge had realised the impending danger from the Americans' advance from the south towards the Canadians. However, with the Canadian attack checked, he thought a successful attack could be mounted against the Americans in the south if units could be pulled out from the crumbling Mortain salient and this line straightened. Hitler agreed, and units of the German Seventh Army began withdrawing eastwards from Mortain that night.

Saturday, August 12

This German withdrawal enabled the Americans to occupy Mortain on Saturday morning. At the same time, in the south, a French task force had reached Alencon. Elated, Major-General Leclerc continued north, trespassing on the Alencon-Argentan road, which had been reserved for his American counterparts, the 5th Armoured. Although this enabled the French to advance within sight of Ecouche, it delayed an American attack on Argentan. When this attack did finally take place, it made little progress.

Meanwhile, in the north, the British XII Corps advancing from the north-east made contact with the Canadians on their left. General Simonds had finalised his plans for Operation 'Tractable', a follow up to 'Totalize', aimed at dominating the roads passing through Falaise and denying them to the Germans.

Left: Sergeant Midgley's picture of British convoys rolling south on the D577 having passed Jurques, midway between Caen and Vire (IWM). Above: A few more houses have been built since 1944 but the same, typically French, dead-straight road is unchanged.

Left: The church was the only building left standing in St. Aunay-sur-Odon when Sergeant Midgley arrived to take photographs on August 9 (IWM). Above: Today, the town including the church have been completely rebuilt and an exact comparison cannot be made.

Monday, August 14

The previous evening a Canadian officer had lost his way, driven into German lines and been killed. On his body the Germans found plans of the 'Tractable' attack. This enabled them to make certain alterations in their defences. Then the preliminary bombing attack, this time by the RAF, proved abortive, killing 65 and wounding 241 Canadian and Polish troops. At 11.37 a.m., the artillery opened fire to begin the operation. At one point the advance was held up until bridges, including the one at Rouvres, destroyed during the bombing, were repaired. Progress was slow and the day ended with the attackers still three miles from Falaise.

To the south, the Americans at Argentan had reached the boundary between the 12th and 21st Army Groups (and had, in fact, overstepped it). General Bradley, fearing a head on clash between the converging Allied armies, ordered a standstill.

Top: In order to cross the River Laison at Rouvres in a hurry, the river was dammed. 'Fitzroy II', an M4 Sherman of the 4th Canadian Brigade, got bogged down; by August 17 a Class 40 Bailey Bridge provided a dry crossing (Public Archives of Canada). Above: In November 1974, we took this perfect comparison; even the church is still under repair.

Left: The flooded main street in Rouvres was pictured by Daily Herald photographer D. H. Esten on August 16. Two Canadians take a cooler outside the village forge. Above: Today the main street has completely changed — the approach road to the site of the 1944 Bailey Bridge runs parallel on the right.

Tuesday, August 15

The task of guarding the left flank of the US XV Corps, advancing to Argentan, belonged to the VII Corps. On the 15th, units captured Tinchebray and made contact with the British driving down from the north on Flers. The Poles were switched to the left of the Canadians and advanced across the River Dives as far as Jort *en route* for Trun, whilst leading Canadian patrols reached the Falaise — St. Pierre-sur-Dives road. The French, at Ecouche in the south, were only eleven miles from the British in the north. During the day, Feldmarschall von Kluge, who had set out to visit a subordinate headquarters, had gone missing. Although this was due to his car being shot up and the traffic jams caused by German units retreating east out of the narrowing pocket, absence of wireless contact with his headquarters led Hitler to suspect he was negotiating with the Allies. As early that morning Allied forces had begun an assault landing on the French Mediterranean coast, it is no wonder Hitler is reported as saying, a fortnight later: 'The 15th of August was the worst day of my life!'

Wednesday, August 16

The Canadian 2nd Division had reached the northern outskirts of Falaise. The town had been flattened in a heavy bombing attack on the night of August 12-13, designed to block the streets and delay the German retreat through the town. When the Canadians arrived the bulldozer operators could scarcely determine where the streets had been. The final attack to clear the town went in at 3.00 p.m. By Thursday morning, the Canadians had reached the railway station, although final resistance by sixty desperate Hitler Youth in the Ecole Superieure lasted until 2.00 a.m. on Friday.

The British Second Army had fought fiercely through Conde sur Noireau and reached Flers on the N24*bis* road, contracting the west of the pocket still further.

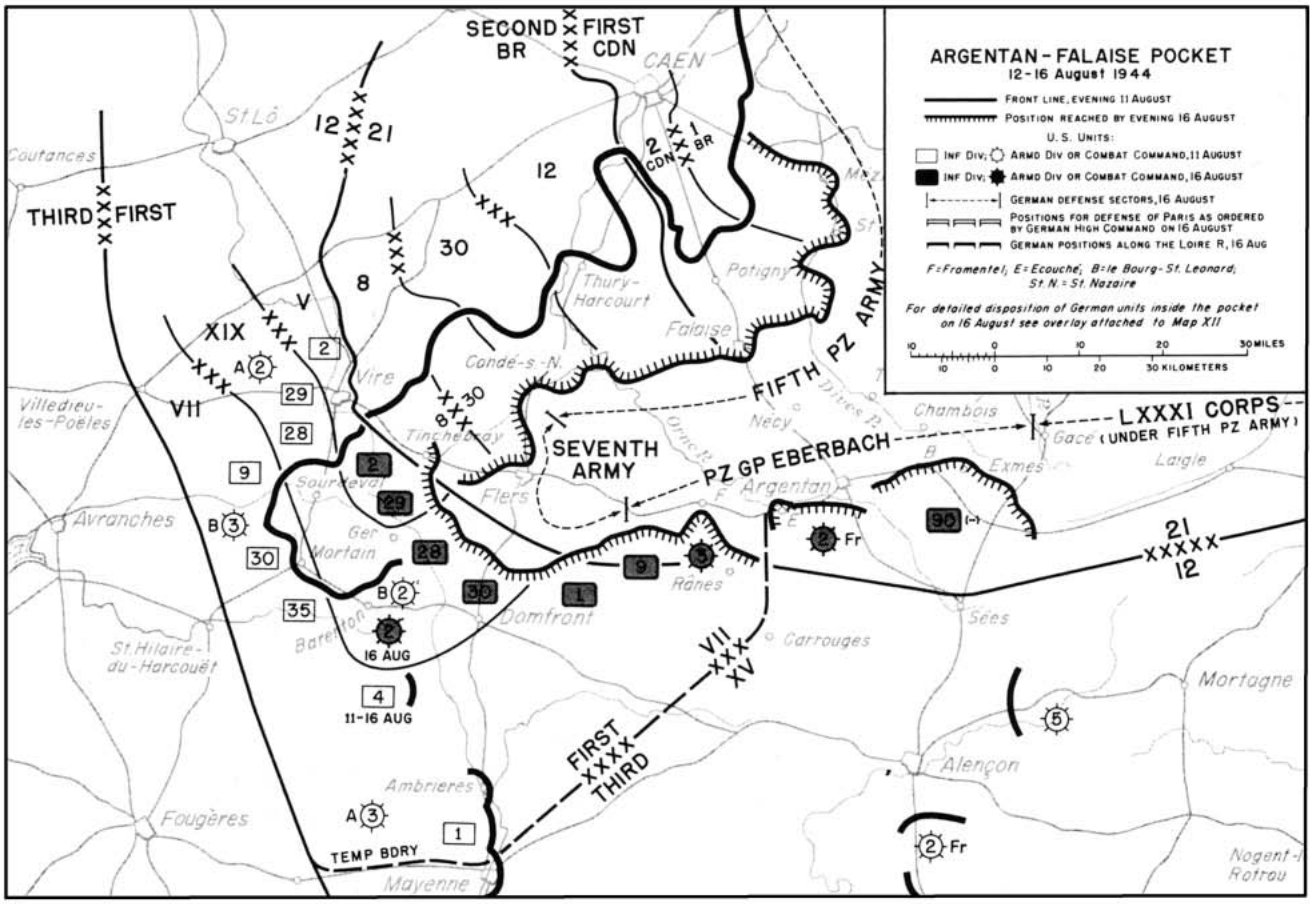
Although Feldmarschall von Kluge had reached his headquarters before daybreak, Hitler had decided to relieve him of command.

Top: The scene in Tinchebray on the N24bis on the southern edge of the pocket; British troops turn left in their advance on Flers. Photographed by Sergeant Laing on August 16 (IWM). Right: Today, virtually unchanged we took this comparison during our advance on Flers, fifteen kilometres away.

Left: North of Tinchebray on the N812 lies Vassy already in the hands of the British 11th Armoured Division. Sergeant Laing, covering this sector in 1944, photographed KSLI troops advancing through the town on August 15 (IWM). Below: Vassy town square makes a good comparison picture today.

Top: Ten kilometres east of Vassy lies Conde on the River Noireau and on the edge of the town the N811 crosses the river at Pont Erambourg. Here, on August 18, Sergeant Gee took a general view of the building of a triple-single Bailey to span the blown bridge (IWM). Left: Later in the day the bridge was completed and Bren carriers crossing it were photographed by Sergeant Midgley (IWM). Top and Above: Our comparisons show the new, rebuilt bridge; nothing to indicate the past but nearby on a wall, faded German direction signs are still visible (photo below).

Left: The Public Archives of Canada photograph of troops of 'A' Company, Le Regiment de Maisonneuve, advancing through Bons-Tassilly on August 16. Note the photograph has been incorrectly printed back to front; compare this with the scene as it really is, photo below, with the same stone obelisk in the churchyard. The church was rebuilt in 1957.



Thursday, August 17

Whilst the fighting continued in the ruins of Falaise, on the southern front, American forces continued to wait behind the Army Group stop line. As a consequence, General Patton had in effect lost interest in the area and General Bradley authorised him to send two Divisions east to the River Seine. These units were soon advancing against little opposition and reached the river on Friday.

Whereas on Wednesday the British Second Army had been involved in fierce fighting advancing to Flers, on Thursday, opposition was negligible — the German Seventh Army was withdrawing. Contact was made with the German rearguards in the afternoon and the British units began encountering all the signs of retreat — an abundance of mines and blown bridges. During the night the Germans had moved back up to eight miles.

To the left the British and the US First Army were attacking Briouze, the next major town on the N24*bis* towards Argentan. Meanwhile an order had been issued for the French 2nd Armoured Division to capture Trun, and for the US 90th Division, on their right, Chambois, thereby narrowing the neck of the pocket to seven miles.

During the afternoon the Canadian 4th Division, advancing east of Falaise, secured a bridgehead across the River Dives, to the north of their planned line of advance along the D63, the Falaise-Trun road. By evening the Canadian Grenadier Guards were only two miles north of Trun. A similar distance to the east was the Polish Armoured Division. A direct frontal clash was feared by SHAEF commanders and Canadian Army HQ began sending hourly situation reports to the Third US Army to keep it informed of the precise whereabouts of the Canadian forward troops.

Von Kluge's successor, Feldmarschall Walter Model, took over during Thursday evening; on Friday, on his way back to Germany, von Kluge committed suicide.

Top: Sergeant Laing was again on hand to photograph these quite rare Challenger tanks passing through Flers on August 17. The Challenger mounted the potent 17-pounder gun (equivalent to the German 88mm) in an enormous turret on a lengthened Cromwell tank chassis — about 200 were produced as 'stiffeners' for British cruiser tank formations (IWM).

eldgendarmerie 884
FELDGENDARMERIE

Falaise has fallen . . .

Top: Canadian troops enter Falaise from the north on the N158 (IWM). Centre: When we visited Falaise in November 1974 a diversion blocked the route taken by the Canadians. Opposite: Sergeant E. O'Hanna and Corporal M. W. Musgrave of the Canadian Provost Corps (Military Police) beside the damaged fountain in the Place St. Gervais (Public Archives of Canada). Left: Later Trooper Zalta, McQuarrie, De Armond and Corporal Thompen (2nd from left) inspect an old flintlock found in the ruins (IWM). Above: After the battle the fountain was moved fifty yards to a new site which, together with rebuilding, make an exact comparison impossible.

Above: Madame Guillou, left, and her daughter Madame Capelle, two of the 300 refugees from Falaise, in the Rue Georges Clemenceau on August 17 as a bulldozer begins to clear the Rue Admiral Courbet (Public Archives of Canada). Inset: A Charcuterie still occupies the corner site today. Below: On August 17, near the Ecole Superieure, troops of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal supported by a Sherbrooke Fusiliers M4 Sherman hunt for snipers on the corner of the Rue de l'Abbatiale and the Rue des Usulines (Public Archives of Canada) with our comparison printed bottom left of opposite page.

Left and above: NBC war correspondent, James Cassidy watches a Morris C8 'Quad' 4x4 guntractor, limber and 25-pounder gun on the Rue Georges Clemenceau travelling towards Argentan. The fountain pictures on pages 10 and 11, were taken just to the left.

Left and above: Nearby, on the corner of the Rue Paul Doumer and Champ St. Michel, two old dears struggle with their bag past the bath house opposite the 'Kaserne Heidelberg' on August 17.

Left and above: A German lies dead on the Avenue Aristide Briand on the southern outskirts of Falaise (Public Archives of Canada). Only the wall beside our Land-Rover remains today; all the buildings on the left of the road have been demolished.

Above: Schoolchildren cross the Rue St. Jean outside the Ecole Superieure (now the Ecole St. Jean) thirty years after other youngsters of the Hitler Youth died here in vain.

Friday, August 18

Allied attempts to close the German escape route between Trun and Chambois had been hampered on Thursday morning by bad flying weather, and by the afternoon, because of the intermingled fighting, it was dangerous to move the bomb line closer than Vimoutiers, fifteen miles to the east. Tremendous efforts were being made by the 2nd SS Panzer Corps to keep the escape route open for the numerous German units retreating towards them, being strafed by Spitfires, Typhoons, Mustangs, Lightnings and Thunderbolts of the Second Tactical Air Force. The pilots commented on considerable motor transport on congested roads, and by mid-morning reported that the 'Bank Holiday rush' was on west of Trun. Ex-Battle of Britain pilot Group Captain Johnny Johnson has recounted the technique employed to destroy the German columns:

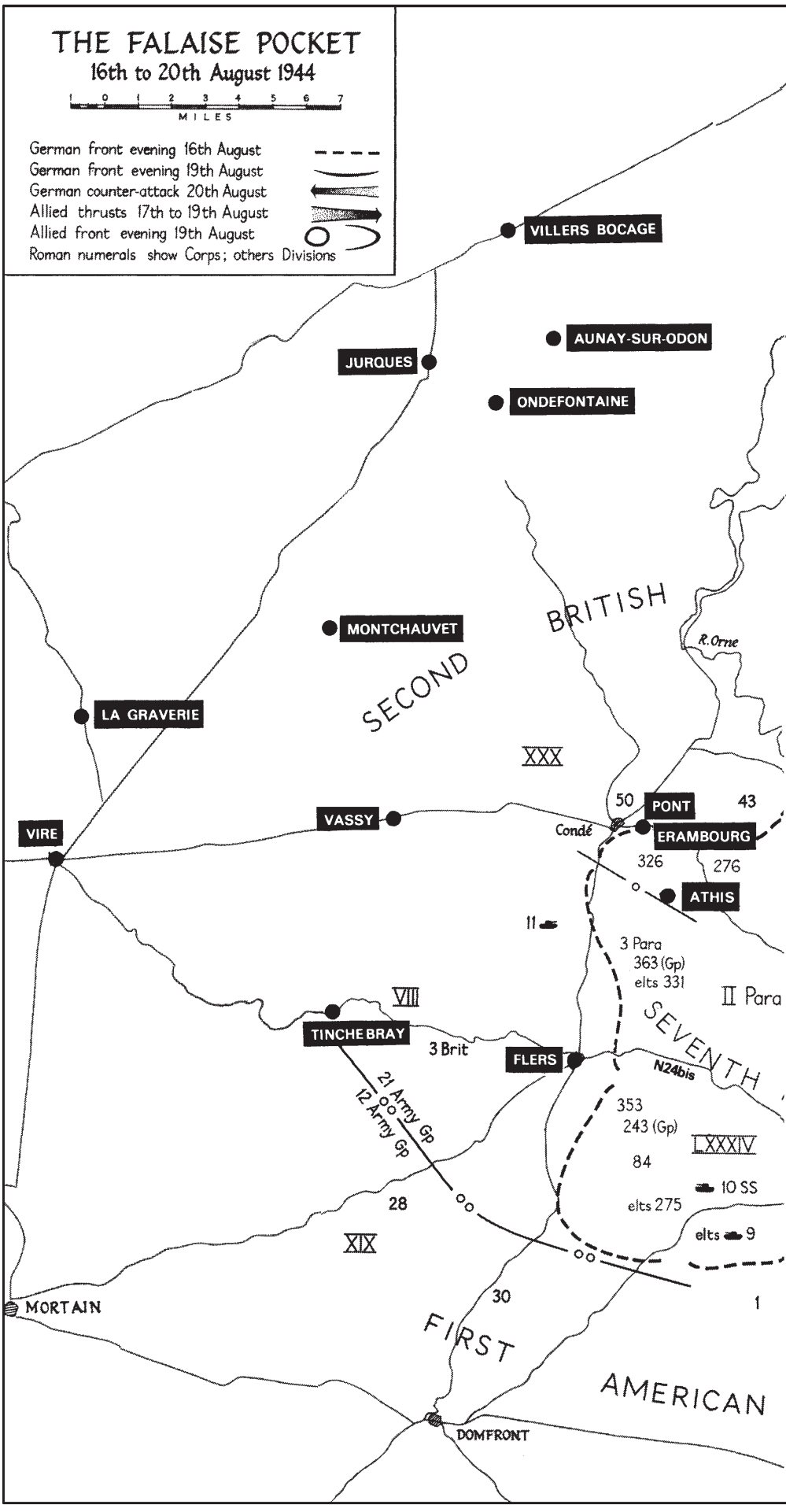
'When the Spitfires arrived over the small triangle of Normandy, bounded by Falaise, Trun, and Chambois, the Typhoons were already hard at work. One of their favourite tactics against long streams of enemy vehicles was to seal off the front and rear of the column by accurately dropping a few bombs. This technique imprisoned the desperate enemy on a narrow stretch of dusty lane, and since the transports were sometimes jammed together four abreast, it made the subsequent rocket and cannon attacks a comparatively easy business against the stationary targets. Some of the armoured cars and tanks attempted to escape their fate by making detours across the fields and wooded country but these were soon spotted by the Typhoon pilots and were accorded the same treatment as their comrades on the highways and lanes.

'Immediately the Typhoons withdrew from the killing-ground the Spitfires raced into the attack. The tactics of the day were low-level strafing attacks with cannon shells and machine-guns . . . the ground crews worked flat out in the hot sunshine to re-arm and refuel the aircraft.'

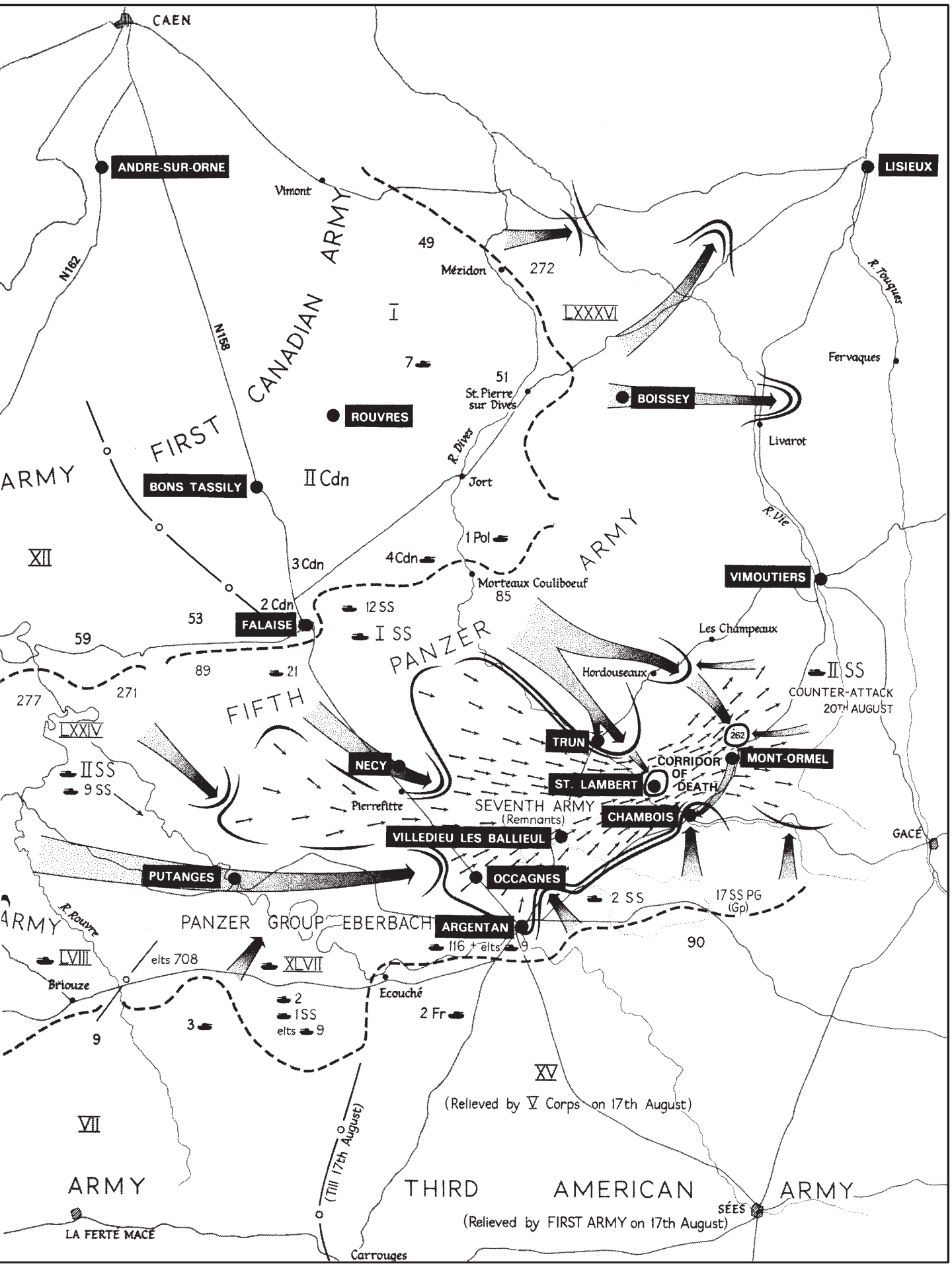
By the end of the day 1,471 sorties had been flown against the retreating German armies, and air crews claimed 1,100 vehicles and 90 tanks destroyed but one pilot reported that '. . . no results observed owing to the number of aircraft in the area . . .'. This congestion caused more mis-directed air attacks; on Saturday over forty were reported, the worst hit being the Polish who lost 72 killed and 191 wounded, as well as half their total petrol supplies. For the aircraft in flight with all the smoke and gunfire, it was difficult to distinguish between retreating Germans and pursuing Allies; three armies all converging on the same objective. This confusion of targets led General Crerar, in his report on the incidents, to state that ' . . . this powerful weapon in support of the Army will constitute a deterrent to ground operations rather than the stimulant of which it is potentially capable.

By Friday evening the pocket was approximately six miles deep and seven miles wide. Five miles south-east of Falaise, the village of Necy had been reached.

The German Seventh Army Commander, Obergruppenfuhrer Paul Hausser, came to the conclusion he would have to fight his way across the River Dives that night, but all roads to the river were clogged with the wreckage of vehicles and armaments of all kinds.



The map illustrates the closing of the Falaise Pocket from August 16-20. Based on an official Crown Copyright map reproduced by permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Towns and villages visited in our tour and illustrated here, are in black panels.


CAEN
ANDRE-SUR-ORNE
LISIEUX
Vimont
CANADIAN ARMY
49
Mézidon
272
N162
N158
I
LXXXVI
R. Touques
Fervaques
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51
St. Pierre sur Dives
BOISSEY
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VIMOUTIERS
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FALAISE
12 SS
I SS
59
PANZER
Les Champeaux
89
21
Hordouseaux
II SS
COUNTER-ATTACK
20TH AUGUST
277
271
FIFTH
LXXIV
262
TRUN
II SS
9 SS
NECY
CORRIDOR OF DEATH
MONT-ORMEL
ST. LAMBERT
Pierrefitte
SEVENTH ARMY
(Remnants)
CHAMBOIS
VILLEDIEU LES BALLIEUL
GACÉ
PUTANGES
OCCAGNES
2 SS
17 SS PG (Gp)
R. Rouvre
ARMY
PANZER GROUP EBERBACH
ARGENTAN
116 + elts
9
90
LVIII
elts 708
XLVII
Briouze
Ecouché
2
1 SS
elts 9
2 Fr
3
9
XV
(Relieved by V Corps on 17th August)
VII
(Till 17th August)
ARMY
THIRD AMERICAN ARMY
SÉES
(Relieved by FIRST ARMY on 17th August)
LA FERTÉ MACÉ
Carrouges

Saturday, August 19

Saturday dawned bright and clear and the agony of the Germans continued as Allied aircraft ceaselessly attacked the packed columns of transport, much of it horse-drawn, making for the Trun-Chambois corridor. The Germans' increasing disorganisation at this stage is reflected in the war diary of the Fifth Panzer Army, one of the two Armies trying to escape, which records only a single entry for this day.

At 11.00 a.m. General Simonds conferred with his divisional commanders and emphasised that encirclement must be complete; no Germans were to escape. Fierce fighting continued in the Trun-Chambois area; the Canadians, Poles and Americans trying to cork the bottle and the Germans desperately trying to keep the bottleneck free. During the morning, B Company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, with C Squadron of the South Alberta Regiment, under the command of Major D. V. Currie

To the editor's knowledge, this is the first time all the photographs taken by Lieutenant Donald Grant (using 3 ¼ x 4 ¼ Speed Graphic) of the Major Currie saga have been reproduced together. Each one is preceded by its official Public Archives of Canada serial number.

Top: 38876. 'B' Company rounding up German soldiers in Trun on August 19 before being ordered into St. Lambert. Centre: Trun hospital today. Left and above: 38877. Close up of the Canadian medical corpsman attending the German in the top photo.

attacked the village of St. Lambert-sur-Dives, mid-way between Trun and Chambois on the D13. After six hours of fierce fighting they had got part of the way through St. Lambert but, although reinforced in the afternoon, in the face of bitterest opposition this force could make no further progress. Major Currie's action in St. Lambert won him the Victoria Cross and an army film unit was on hand to record the episode. This is his story.

'In the early hours, before first light, on Friday August 18, 1944, we arrived at our designated area, somewhere north of Trun, on the high ground overlooking the Dives valley. When I say "we", I am referring to "C" Squadron of the 19th Canadian Armoured Reconnoissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment) 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Our normal strength would be nineteen tanks. On this particular day, we were fifteen tanks strong, which means 75 men; five men per tank.

'After settling down in the dark (pitch black) we tried to pinpoint our exact position and make our location report to Regimental Headquarters. After considerable discussion and some argument amongst my officers, we arrived at an agreed map reference, and made our report. Needless to say, when daylight broke and we found that we were within 100 yards of our objective, we were justly proud of our navigation; having covered approximately 15 miles, on a dark moonless night, and arriving so close to our objective.

'As the sun rose, and we were able to reconnoitre our position and carry out our reconnaissance role, we found that we had a wonderful panoramic view of the Dives Valley. In the distance, we could see rising clouds of dust, and on closer examination, by field glasses, found that we were witnessing, what we later found out to be the remnants of the German Forces in France trying to escape the pocket. The columns were about three to four miles from our location and seemed to consist of every type and kind of vehicle, gun, tank and horse-drawn equipment that the German Army possessed. The column stretched as far as we could see. It was an awe-inspiring sight, and from the distance, it appeared to be a crushing force. Having made my report to the Regimental Commander, we were ordered to hold our present position and be prepared to stop any attempted break-through by any part of the German Army. We deployed into position facing the enemy and spent most part of the day watching the columns inching along in a never-ending stream.

'At about 3.00 p.m., I received a call on the radio to report to Regimental Headquarters for a meeting with the Colonel, and while I was attending the meeting, my second in command was to move the squadron to a location just outside Trun, which at that time was being cleared of Germans by units of the Second Canadian Division.

'On arriving at the meeting, I was informed by the Colonel that he had a rather tough assignment that we were to take on. For this job, we were to have under command a company of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders whose depleted strength was about 55 all ranks. He informed me also that there was no immediate artillery support, but that later on, there should be some available.

St.Lambert-sur-Dives

Above: 38878. German soldiers are marched up the hill to Trun. Major Currie is standing at the rear of the column, hand on hip. Below: St. Lambert makes fascinating comparison photographs today. M. Bourdon's house still shows the repaired roof and wall.

'The assignment given us by the Colonel was to take the village of St.Lambert-sur-Dives; and from a study of the map, I could see this was placing us squarely in front of the vast array of the German forces that we had been watching for most of the day. The Colonel also stressed the importance of this task in relation to the whole campaign and indicated that the German withdrawal had to be stopped. I still remember my first reaction to this task. I remember saying to myself, "Well, Dave, up to now this has been a pretty good war, but this is it!"

'I rejoined my squadron, outlined the situation, and plan of attack to my officers and we then moved into Trun, which was to be our starting point.

'The battle for Trun had obviously been a heavy one, as about one-third of the houses in the village seemed to be on fire. We had about an hour to wait for start time, which was 6.00 p.m. The boys brewed tea, and made last minute preparations for the coming battle.

'Just before six o'clock, we were lined up on the southwest end of Trun in the battle order we had decided upon. This was No. 1 Troop (four tanks) leading, followed by Squadron Headquarters (three tanks and first aid vehicle), then Nos. 2 and 3 troops, each four tanks, with the Infantry support riding on the backs of the tanks. We had decided that the tanks would lead the attack and, as and when we were able to penetrate the village, the infantry would come up and consolidate the position.

'Just about one minute before we pushed off, an infantry sergeant from one of the units of the 2nd Canadian Division, who had been in the battle for Trun, came along holding his mess tin. I was sitting on top of my tank. He asked me if I wanted a drink. I said, "Sure, what is it?" He said that he didn't know and passed it along to me. I took a good healthy swallow and almost choked to death. His remark at my antics, "Sure is hot, ain't it?" was the understatement of the year! I found out later that I had had my first introduction to that fiery Normandy Speciality known as Calvados.

'We pushed off at exactly 6.00 p.m. and the lead tank immediately came under fire from the extreme left flank. The troop leader pulled his tanks back under cover of some buildings. I checked the position from which the fire had come, on the map, and found that it could only have come from the Polish Armoured Division located on our left. I went over to their area and found, sure enough, one of their tank commanders had become a little excited at the appearance of our tanks and had fired first and looked later. They apologized and assured me that it would not happen again. We finally got under way about twenty minutes' late, and proceeded towards St. Lambert without further incident.

'I had just received a report that my lead troop had entered St. Lambert and that the first tank had been hit by 88 mm. fire. At the same moment, Squadron Headquarters was attacked by two Royal Air Force Spitfires. They made one pass over our tanks and after they had gone, I noticed that the back end of my tank was on fire. I got out with a fire extinguisher to put out the fire, and they again attacked us. I dove into a ditch beside the road. On the second attack, they wounded four men and put the First Aid ambulance vehicle out of commission. I asked Regimental Headquarters to supply two ambulance jeeps to take care of the four wounded men and as soon as they had made the first trip, to come to the edge of St. Lambert to pick up the wounded from the tank. I then proceeded to St. Lambert, on foot, to the tank that had been hit. The men from the tank were lying in the ditch beside the road. One was rather badly wounded and two others had minor wounds. The ambulance jeeps arrived shortly and we were able to get them away to hospital.

'I asked my troop leader to remain in his present position, with his three remaining tanks; this was on the edge of St. Lambert.

'By this time, it was getting pretty dark. I made a reconnaissance about half way into St. Lambert to see if there was a possibility of getting to the main cross roads, where the 88 mm. fire had come from by another route other than up the main street. As near as I could tell, in the rapidly darkening night, the Dives River which ran through the town prevented us from flanking the German 88 mm. gun. I could hear the voices of Germans in some of the buildings, but did not run into anyone during my reconnaissance on foot.

'I returned to the edge of St. Lambert where I had left the three remaining tanks of No. 1 Troop and we pulled back about 200 yards, where we took up positions covering St. Lambert. I requested permission from my Colonel to dismount most of the tank crews and combined with our Infantry support, make an attack on the village using the infantry and three tanks. This was refused and

Above: 38879. Perhaps the most well known of all the photographs in the series shows German troops under Hauptmann Rauch giving themselves up to Major Currie (holding the Colt revolver on the left), and Colour Sergeant-Major George Mitchell. From enquiries the editor has made in Canada, it seems that the cine-film being shot by the cameraman on the left was lost in a fire in 1967, which destroyed the nitrate film store of the National Film Board.

Above: A fascinating 'after the battle' comparison, not only of the same spot but the same man. General Simonds, commander of the Canadian 2nd Corps, photographed with Major Currie in St. Lambert when they returned to the scene thirty years later (John Evans). Below: 38880. The censor has been at work on Major Currie's formation patch. Lieutenant Grant records that 'before we got the prisoners and the vehicles out of the way the rest of the convoy came in sight, saw us and tried to retreat.'

we were ordered to wait for daylight and at that time to resume the attack. We spent a watchful and rather unrestful night just outside St. Lambert.

SATURDAY

'At the first sign of dawn, we once again put in an attack on the village. We lost our lead tank, but this time we located the opposition. We were up against a Tiger tank and a Mk IV tank. We got about one-quarter of the way down the main street.

'Shortly afterward, my own command tank was able to knock out the Mk IV tank. The boys made sure that it was on fire before they stopped firing. The Tiger tank was put out of commission by the supporting Infantry, who had worked their way down the street through the houses. They shot two of the crew and put a grenade into the turret, which finished off the rest of the crew. We were then in possession of about two-thirds of the village.

'Up to this time, I had lost two officers, one wounded the preceding evening by our Air Force planes and one who leaned out of his tank to wave in some Germans waving a white flag. One of them shot him through the chest and though badly wounded he survived. During the rest of Saturday, the fighting was bitter and at one point late in the afternoon, the tanks were running around in circles firing at one another, to keep the Germans from climbing on top of them. At this point, I was able to get some artillery support. They laid down a barrage on our own position. I had warned everyone to get under cover. I had expected that the support would be from 18 pounders, but instead it was from 4.5 in. guns. The fire from 18 pounders has very little effect on tanks but a 4.5 in. gun can easily knock out a tank. We were lucky and suffered no casualties from our own guns, but it had a very devastating effect on the Germans and gave us a much needed respite, as the tanks were running low on ammunition.

'Late in the day, we were able to get ammunition up from our supply column. It was brought up in armoured vehicles. The tanks then came in to Headquarters area from their positions one at a time, and were refuelled and loaded with ammunition.

'Pressure from the Germans mounted again near dark, and as we were pretty well spread out, I was afraid that we might be chopped up piecemeal. I decided to draw the force in tighter for the night, so we gave up a part of the village. All weapons were given fixed lines of fire, to cover all approaches, and everyone was warned to stay put for the night and under cover. During the night, there was considerable firing and no one got much sleep. In the morning we found that we had inflicted a considerable number of casualties on the Germans during the night.

Top: 38881. The fight continues as 'B' Company prepares to advance through the village. Left: 38882. Halfway up the main street, an M4 Sherman tries to pass another on fire; above, our 1974 comparison. The house at the end of the main street marks the end of St. Lambert.

SUNDAY

'With the coming of daylight, the attacks started to intensify, but on this, the second full day, we started to take a few prisoners; we got the feeling that some of the Germans wanted to give up but that the majority still wanted to fight. We were still under shell fire, which had been pretty steady from the time we arrived in St. Lambert.

'This day was the hard day on officers. In the early hours, two tank commanding officers were wounded in the head by small arms fire. While the wounds were not serious, thanks to the steel helmets, they were serious enough that the officers had to be evacuated to hospital. A little later, one of my tank officers was on the ground and was wounded by shell fire. He later died from his wounds. Late in the morning, I was talking to the Captain and Lieutenant from the Supporting Infantry when one of the crew from my tank called to me that the Colonel wished to speak to me on the radio. I had just climbed into the tank when in came an 88mm. HE shell. When I finished talking to the Colonel and was back on the ground, I found that both of the officers had been killed by the shell. This meant that at this stage, all my officers were out of action — five wounded and two killed.

'During the afternoon, fighting was spasmodic, and in the lulls, increasing numbers of prisoners were coming in. Among the prisoners we took that day was a German doctor and two Germans who had spent many years in America. As an increasing number of the prisoners coming in were rather badly wounded, we established a first aid post in one of the houses near Squadron Headquarters. We used the two Germans, who spoke fluent English, as interpreters to issue instructions to the prisoners. As they came in, we lined them up, took all weapons, including knives; we also took blankets and any first aid supplies they might be carrying. The blankets and first aid supplies were turned over to the German doctor who ran the medical post. As soon as we had from thirty to fifty prisoners, we picked an officer or N.C.O. and put him in charge of the group. They were then instructed to march down the road, where they would be met and conducted to a Prisoner-of-War area. I was not able to spare escorts for these prisoners, so we had one of the tanks on top of the hill just outside St. Lambert placed so that it could watch the prisoners from the time they left St. Lambert until they were picked up by our people in the rear. The location and purpose of this "Watch Dog" tank was explained to the prisoners and of the more than 2,500 that marched down the road in the next 48 hours, only one tried to escape. He took off through the fields but did not get very far.

'In the early evening, we noticed that the Germans were apparently preparing another major assault on our position. We spotted an 88 mm. ground gun and a Mk IV tank moving into a position about 400 yards from our Headquarters. We immediately opened fire, using eight tanks firing armour-piercing and HE shells. One of the first shots fired hit the 88 mm. gun. It must have hit the ammunition carrier as there was a tremendous explosion. One large piece of white hot metal about 5 inches in diameter came down right in our location. There were a number of large buildings and apparently the Germans had massed behind them in preparation for this attack. We fired through these buildings using

Above: 38883. Lieutenant Grant photographed the street down which he had come; on the road in the distance, German prisoners march up the hill. Right: Our comparison. Bottom: 38884. Close up of the South Alberta Regiment Sherman on fire.

armour-piercing shells. We fired about 100 rounds and stopped. We could hear the cries and hollering, but there was no attack. We had apparently discouraged any further plans for attack at that moment.

'The third night was a little better and passed relatively quietly. I made a trip back to Regimental Headquarters at about one in the morning and assured the Colonel that everything was under control. After my return, I was standing outside Squadron Headquarters area beside the road, at about three o'clock in the morning, when we heard a tank coming down the road. It came from the direction of our own lines. It passed so close to me that I could have reached out and touched it. We did not know for sure if it was a German tank or one of our own. As it passed down the street, it came between us and a burning building. We could then see that it was a German Mk IV tank. We put a shot into the motor compartment, which set the tank on fire. Later on, another tank wandered into the area just to the rear of our position. It was so dark that we could not see it. As a matter of fact, it almost ran over one of the infantry defensive positions. The tank stopped and the motor was turned off. Finally we heard someone say, "I wonder where the hell we are". It was a tank from one of the other squadrons of my unit. They had been wandering around most of the night, lost. They were certainly glad to see us, and spent the rest of the night with us, leaving in the morning to rejoin unit headquarters.

MONDAY

'The day dawned hot and clear, as all the others had for the past few weeks. You could feel the change in the situation this day; we could tell that the end was in sight. There was some shelling but it was rather sporadic. Prisoners started rolling in, in a never-ending stream. In mid-morning, a convoy of ambulance vehicles came in and demanded that we let them through in the name of mercy. I took a look in the ambulances and the wounded were piled in like cordwood. I told the doctor that if he were really interested in saving lives, he had better go to our lines and

to our hospital. He didn't have enough gas in the ambulances to go anywhere else. He finally decided that we were right and took off for our hospital.

'During the day we continued to take prisoners and pass them back to our Headquarters. The fight had apparently gone out of the enemy. When night came, I was able to get some sleep. This was my first sleep for three days.

'I slept like the dead for about eight hours and woke up to another beautiful morning. The birds were singing and all shell fire had ceased; it was so peaceful.

TUESDAY

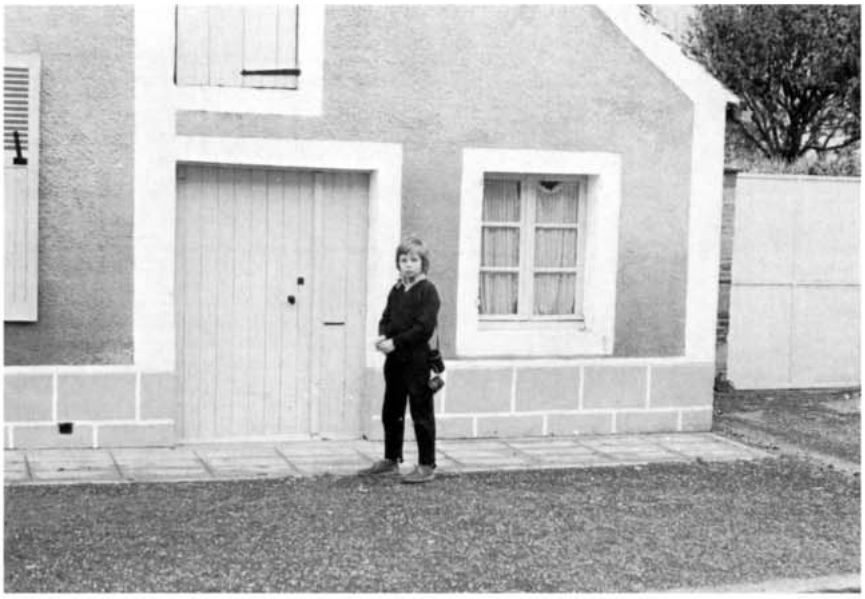
'Shortly after breakfast, we received orders to pull up stakes and move on. Within an hour, we were heading for the Seine, on the heels of the fleeing Germans.

'So ended St. Lambert. We had arrived early in the morning and three days later left in the morning. We had been sorely tried by the Germans and for many, this was their last fight. The men had been asked to take on incredible odds, and while at times I am sure they were all afraid, I know I was, every last man did the job asked of him, without complaint, even though at times the situation seemed so hopeless and I know that they felt it. When we came to St. Lambert, it was a neat small quiet French village, and when we left, it was a fantastic mess. The clutter of equipment, dead horses, wounded, dying and dead Germans, had turned it into a hell hole. It seems incredible that such devastation could be wrought in such a short space of time!'

Top: 38885. The Canadians have reached the far end of the village passing a very dead Tiger 1 with its turret blown into the hedge on the right. Above: Our comparison with the sign board in the distance indicating the end of St. Lambert — from end to end not more than 500 yards. Below left: Incredibly, Alain Roudeix found a piece from the wrecked Tiger in the ditch at the side of the road during our February 1975 visit. Below: 38886. Last picture in the series — the town is cleared; only the Corridor of Death lies between the Canadians and the Americans and Poles in Chambois, less than a mile away.

On Saturday evening, whilst Major Currie was busily engaged in St. Lambert, two miles down the D13 at Chambois a momentous event took place — the first link up across the Gap between the Poles and Americans. Naturally both claim to have captured Chambois, with the Canadians, arriving a few minutes later, a close third. Company G of the US 90th Division's 359th Infantry, which had entered the town from the south-west, met the Polish 10th Mounted Rifle Regiment near the main crossroads. The exact time is in question being variously reported by the Poles as 7.20 p.m., the Canadians 7.40 p.m., and by the Americans as 8.13 p.m. The classic photograph of the symbolic handshake between Corporal Grabowski of the 10th Polish Dragoons and GI John Wellington of the US 359th Regiment was taken nearby on the Rue de Vimoutiers. Ten miles to the south-west the US 80th Division had taken Argentan.

Below: A Polish photograph of the keep at Chambois, captured from the Germans on Saturday, August 19 (Sikorski Institute). Today repairs to the damaged stonework are still continuing.



Top: The photograph of Pte. John Wellington and Corporal Grabowski which says it all. Although the Polish and American forces had met up in Chambois, the narrow Corridor of Death between them and Major Currie in St. Lambert still remained open (Sikorski Institute). Above: The editor's son outside M. Albert Dudouit's house on the D16 outside which the handshake photograph was taken. Corporal Grabowski is still alive living in Yorkshire and corresponds with John Wellington in the USA. Below: The memorial stone recording the occasion on the village square near the keep.

Argentan captured

Above: Perhaps one of the most striking pictures to come out of WWII taken by Signal Corps photographer Jakarewicz on August 20. A Pzkpfw 5 Panther lies silent; GIs of the US 80th Division (which captured the town) rest outside a German employment agency — now closed for business! (US Army). Below: Who would imagine the state this street was in thirty years previously.

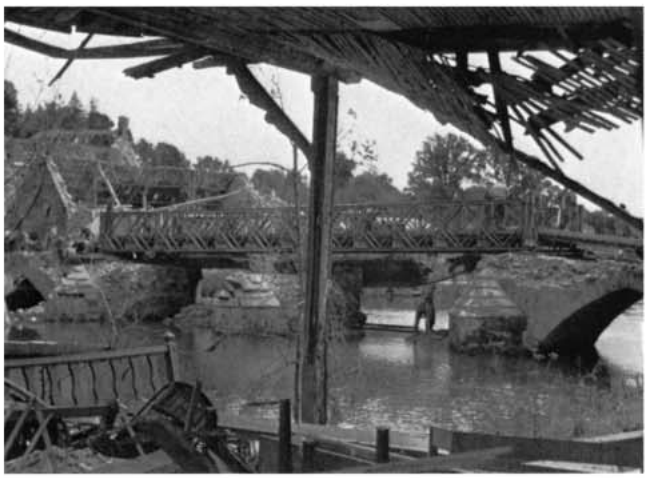
Top: August 20 — the road into Argentan from the south. Yank infantry pass the Ecole Maternelle past the shot-up sign post on the outskirts of the town (US Army) with our comparison, above. Below: La Place des '3 Croix' photographed by Sergeant Laing on August 21. British Cromwell tanks roll in from Flers whilst US Infantry march through the town (IWM). Bottom right: The monument was never repaired after the war.

Centre: Sergeant Gee's picture of the corner of Rue Saint Martin on August 22 showing German, French and British signs (IWM). Above: What a pity this hoarding hides the German Trun sign, indicating the direction of the German escape route out of the pocket.

Left and above: Between St. Pierre-sur-Dives and Liverot (on the route taken by Rommel on July 17, see page 43) lies the village of Boissey. Here on August 20, 1944, Lance Corporal Sweetman and Driver Walker paused for a wash. Thirty years later, on November 2, 1974 Editor Ramsey also stopped here.

Left and above: By August 19, this Frenchman obviously felt safe enough to proclaim the end of Hitler in the town square of Athis north of Flers (IWM). Today the same spot almost unchanged.

Left and above: 'Dare we say it—knock knock whose there, open the door and in came a Pzkpfw 4H' (IWM). Today, no longer a shop, it is still occupied by the Grimbert family in Putanges.



Left and above: Further down the road, Sergeant Palmer (also of No. 5 Film and Photographic Unit) took this picture of the Putanges bridge, showing the double-single Bailey replacing the bridge blown by the Germans in their retreat (IWM). Our comparison shows the present bridge built in 1954.

5

Sunday, August 20

Although a junction between the northern and southern forces had been made, Sunday 20th, is considered to be the fiercest day of the battle.

The German Seventh Army, or what was left of it, almost surrounded, was trying to break out to join up with the 2nd SS Panzer Corps on the far side of Mont-Ormel at Camembert, fighting westward. Mont-Ormel, a towering 800-foot mace-shaped ridge, dominated the German escape route. Since night-fall on Saturday evening, it had been held by part of the Polish 1st Armoured Division who were occupying a defensive perimeter overlooking the D16, the Chambois-Vimoutiers road. However, no supplies reached the Poles, and by early on Sunday morning, they realised they were cut off by Germans astride the roads to their rear.

When the morning mist cleared, the whole plain below the ridge came into Polish view. It made an incredible sight. The ground was covered with German columns moving north-east using where possible the clogged roads and, elsewhere, direct across the fields. As the Polish guns were making the most of the sitting targets beneath them, the Germans launched the first of several counter-attacks against the ridge. Fanatical attempts were made by SS troops, extricated from the pocket, by corps commander, General Eugen Meindl, to gain the heights and so hold a dominating position to protect the last escape route for the remnants of their army. Fighting on the slopes of Mont-Ormel continued throughout the day, the climax coming at 5.00 p.m. when German infantry, supported by tanks and heavy mortar fire broke through the perimeter. The attack was finally beaten off only by the combined efforts of infantry, tank crews and the men of a mortar platoon acting as riflemen after they had used all their mortar ammunition. Not until 7.00 p.m. was the last German attempt to break through repulsed. By that time the Poles, their perimeter compressed, short of ammunition, petrol and medical supplies, had three hundred wounded men lying out in the open under enemy fire. They were also faced with the problem of 800 German prisoners held within the perimeter. No help reached the Poles and, as night came, they became an island surrounded by a stream of escaping Germans. This battle of Mont-Ormel later came to be referred to by the Polish troops as 'Maczuga' the Polish word for a 'mace', after the shape of the hills they had defended.

Above: Dawn on Mont-Ormel overlooking the Corridor of Death; today a Sherman Firefly (given by the Americans from their depot at Chinon, near Tours, in 1966) stands sentinel on the Polish memorial on the crest of Hill 262.

Centre: A Polish photograph of the wreckage surrounding the Calvary on Mont-Ormel after the battle in August, 1944 was over. (Sikorski Institute). Above: Today, cleared of any signs of the battle, the cross repaired, a neat sign directs visitors to the memorial. Left: Alain Roudeix pointed out this damaged tree to us on Mont-Ormel where a shell had blown a German soldier who remained transfixed to the tree for six months.

Above: The D16, which runs between the two Mont-Ormel hills, 252 and 262, along which the Germans were trying to retreat towards Vimoutiers. Alain Roudeix remembers entering the tank in the right foreground only to find part of a body in the turret. A Polish M4 Sherman can be seen on the left hillside. (Eddy Florentin). Below: It just does not seem possible that this is the same road today, probably passed thousands of times by tourists on their way to Mont-Ormel.

The Corridor of Death

The German escape route had, by now, been compressed into a narrow corridor two miles wide, with St. Lambert forming the western boundary and Chambois the eastern. Parallel, and to the west of the D13 road which joins these two villages, runs the River Dives. Although the river is only five to ten yards wide, its banks are sheer where the water has cut into the Normandy soil. These banks, six to eight feet high, form an effective anti-tank type barrier to mechanical or horse-drawn transport. This caused the German escape to create bottlenecks around the three man-made crossing points: a stone road bridge, and a light bridge at the rear of St. Lambert and a ford at a small hamlet, Moissy, halfway between St. Lambert and Chambois. Additionally all the lanes in the area leading to the river passed through the village of Tournai-sur-Dives. Because of these factors, the route at this point narrowed into a corridor only a few hundred yards wide leading to the three possible crossing sites. The Germans called it 'Das Korridor des Todes'—'The Corridor of Death'.

Top: The Corridor of Death — the lane leading from Moissy ford visible in our aerial photograph, opposite, photographed by Captain Knight on August 25 after the fighting was over (IWM). Today the farm belongs to M. Dominic Jacqueau who has erected a barn beside the lane, unfortunately hiding the view of the farmhouse.

Top: Our aerial picture of the Corridor of Death. The ford over the River Dives is in the foreground — this formed the eastern extremity of the corridor. The road running across the photograph leads to Chambois to the right (about half a mile) and St. Lambert to the left also about half a mile away. In the distance, out of the picture, is Mont-Ormel. Centre left: Captain Knight's picture of the field on the left of the lane with M. Morellec leading the horse (IWM). Above: We found a battered German helmet and other small items in this same field in 1975! Left: Alain Roudeix at Moissy ford finds a German radio fitting.

The whole area was subjected to air and artillery attacks. Saturday night found Standartenfuhrer Kurt Meyer, who had commanded the 12th SS in their defence of Falaise on August 10, one of those caught in the corridor. Urged on by his Cossack orderly, Michel, he later recalled, 'The sweat run into my smarting eyes and my old head wound opened. There was a continual bombardment registering bulls-eyes every time. The Canadian and Polish guns found our range and could not miss. The whole country was saturated with dead or wounded German soldiers'.

Another German commander, General Mahlmann of the 353rd Division, was trapped nearby in Tournai-sur-Dives '. . . beneath the steeple of the old church, whose pale silhouette stood out amongst the flames. The village was ablaze, its streets were impassable, clearing them cost us several hours.' One of his columns was trying to cross the Dives at the nearby Moissy ford. By pouring tanks and vehicles into the ford, the Seventh Army filled the deep gap and soldiers nearly killed each other fighting to cross the river.

At night in St. Lambert, Major Currie could hear the Germans crossing the bridge on the northern outskirts of the village, passing his lines on foot or in horse-drawn vehicles. During the day, the aircraft and artillery brought death and destruction.

Top: An aerial view of the two St. Lambert bridges (still the original ones) which, together with Moissy ford, formed the three German crossing points over the steep-banked River Dives. Right: We now know that Captain Knight's famous photograph was taken on the edge of St. Lambert. The old Marie building, since demolished, is on the right.

Left: Our search in progress on the dump near Tournai-sur-Dives where (above) bones of horses are mingled with household refuse. Below: Part of a jack-boot recovered from the area.

Above: Alain Roudeix looks lovingly at a derelict German wagon in the 'corridor' and the haggling with the farmer starts. Below: Our comparison of Captain Knight's photograph with, below right, a snapshot taken by an unknown Polish soldier from almost the identical spot. Rubble from the destroyed WWI memorial lies in the foreground.

Monday, August 21

Final last ditch attacks were launched by the Germans during the morning up the south-western slopes of Mont-Ormel against that part of the Polish perimeter nearest the D16 road. The culmination came around noon with a suicidal attack of German infantry straight up the hill. The fire of massed Polish machine guns smashed this last attempt to gain the heights. In the afternoon, advancing Canadian troops made contact with the Poles. Supplies arrived at 2.00 p.m. and evacuation of prisoners and wounded commenced. The Poles had lost 350 men but had captured 1,000 Germans. The Battle of Maczuga was over.

During the early hours of the morning, small isolated groups of Germans were able to slip across the Dives. Later on Allied units began joining up; the British 53rd Division met the Canadians at Trun and the Americans at Villedieu les Bailleul. The fighting gradually subsided along the Dives during the morning and by noon, all St. Lambert was in Canadian hands. Part of the South Alberta Regiment fought its way through to Chambois and as a result of the days operations, firm contact was made with the Poles. The Gap was finally and completely closed.

Top: The gap is finally closed—the British and Americans meet at Villedieu les Bailleul on the D247 and shake hands opposite a cafe appropriately named 'Le Relais des Amis' (IWM). Above: Our two Frenchmen 'Roger and Roudeix' re-stage the meeting in February 1975.

The Aftermath

Although small numbers of Germans continued to pass through the lines on Monday, by 4.00 p.m., all escape was impossible and Allied troops accepted German surrenders, both in small groups and *en masse* and individual German soldiers were rounded up from the surrounding fields and woods.

It is impossible to accurately assess the numbers of Germans that escaped. Various historians have put this at between 20-50,000 men; German Army Group B reported that 40 to 50 per cent of the encircled units succeeded in breaking out to join with the 2nd Panzer Corps. Probably 50,000 Germans were captured including three generals, although again, no accurate totals were made.

The battlefield itself was an inferno of destruction. From more than 10,000 German corpses and hundreds of dead horses rose a stench that reached even to the pilots that flew overhead. Within the final killing ground (bordered by Pierrefitte, Argentan, Chambois, Vimoutiers and Trun), British investigators of No. 2 Operational Research Section found 187 tanks and self propelled guns, 157 lightly armoured vehicles, 1778 lorries, 669 cars and 252 other artillery pieces. As Colonel Stacey reports in the Official Canadian History, 'The heaviest concentration was south and south-west of St. Lambert. Much of the German transport had been horse-drawn but no exact count was made of carts and waggons, for the investigators found that the stench of dead horses was so overpowering that where there was any number of horse-drawn vehicles, that area had to be passed with all speed'.

On Wednesday, August 23, the Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower visited the battlefield. In his book, 'Crusade in Europe', he records that 'I was conducted through it on foot, to encounter scenes that could be described only by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh.'

An American officer who had observed the destruction of the Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne battlefields in World War I and had seen the destruction in London and at St. Lo in World War II, visited the scene on August 31, and described it in the following words:

'None of these compared in the effect upon the imagination with what I saw yesterday southwest of Trun . . . The grass and trees were vividly green as in all Normandy and a surprising number of houses were . . . untouched. That rather peaceful setting framed a picture of destruction so great that it cannot be described. It was as if an avenging angel had swept the area bent on destroying all things German . . .

'I stood on a lane, surrounded by 20 or 30 dead horses or parts of horses, most of them still hitched to their wagons and carts . . . As far as my eye could reach (about 200 yards) on every line of sight, there were . . . vehicles, wagons, tanks, guns, prime movers, sedans, rolling kitchens, etc., in various stages of destruction . . .

'I stepped over hundreds of rifles in the

Top: Wreckage photographed by Sergeant Mapham on August 21 near Necy. Above: We discovered this location quite by chance as this photograph was uncaptioned. Right: Readers can imagine our excitement and surprise to find the broken-off arm from the sign post still in the ditch.

mud and saw hundreds more stacked along sheds . . . I walked through a mile or more of lanes where the vehicles had been caught closely packed . . . I saw probably 300 field pieces and tanks, mounting large caliber guns, that were apparently undamaged.

'I saw no foxholes or any other type of shelter or field fortifications. The Germans were trying to run and had no place to run. They were probably too exhausted to dig. . . . They were probably too tired even to surrender.'

Left: The view looking the other way down the road showing a knocked-out Stug 3 assault gun, which were built in large numbers based on the Pzkpfw 3 tank chassis (IWM). Above: The deserted road, November 1974.

Other visitors and correspondents have given us their vivid impressions of the carnage to be seen when the fighting ceased.

'On the Vimoutiers road, a convey of 40 vehicles had been surprised by Typhoons. You could walk along them for 330 yards. Each vehicle was a hulk and the crews were rotting corpses on the verges. This is the type of thing you do not try to describe, but to forget.'

Alan Wood

'In the open country, as in the village of Tournai, one continually came across steel helmets, rifles, cartridges, shells, grenades, flamethrowers, capes, tunics, canvas, boots and blankets.'

Abbe Launay

'At Bailleul there was not an acre of ground without its wreckage from the German debacle. The roads were marked with skeletons, burnt trees, metal hulks blackened by fire, war material and abandoned loot, corpses of men and horses teeming with worms.'

Maurice Dornois

'It was like one of those paintings of Waterloo or Borodino, except that the victims were different. Each staff car — and I must have seen hundreds — was laden with booty looted from the French and German equipment. There was a profusion of everything — binoculars, typewriters, revolvers, small arms, crates of wine, food and medical supplies, harness. Each car was stuffed with clothing, and it seemed that every officer wanted to take home a pair of corsets.'

Alan Moorehead

'Chambois will remain in our memory as a kind of vast graveyard. To open a passage for our vehicles the Americans had to sweep the corpses aside with a bulldozer.'

Lieutenant-Colonel Repiton-Preneuf

Sherman M4 at St. Christophe-le-Jajolet. The stone marks three French graves.

'On the 7 kilometres from Coudehard to Tournai I was unable to put my foot to the ground. I walked with my handkerchief to my nose over shells, the remains of tanks, guns and cars. The ground was a shambles, with corpses of soldiers piled on each other, dead cattle and disembowelled horses. We waded in blood.'

M. Esnay

'In practically every German car there were silk stockings, lingerie, silverware and jewellery. I found seven handbags in one armoured car. The ground was littered with military orders, documents, boxes of Turkish cigarettes, private correspondence, rations and ammunition. A German truck had been hit by a shell in the driver's seat; the man's feet were still on the accelerator but the rest of the body had been blown 20 ft in the air into a tree. It was so hot at the end of August, that you only had to touch a piece of metal to have your hand burnt. In this temperature the corpses decomposed rapidly; the whole battlefield gave forth a fetid stench which I shall never forget, and which lingered in our nostrils and lungs long after we had left the region.'

Peter Simonds

Eddy Florentin describes what happened next in his book 'The Battle of the Falaise Gap':

For weeks thousands of visitors came to harvest the battlefield; they arrived in carts, in cars and in trucks. 'Go to Tournai, you'll find everything there,' the word went round. Clothing coupons, sheets, linen, wool, layettes, office material, toilet articles, all kinds of hardware and pharmaceutical products; on the deserted battlefield more was to be found than in the best stocked store.

Peter Simonds was shocked by the way the French looted. They reminded him of 'vultures stripping the carcase of a tiger after a death-struggle with a lion.' The French, by removing tyres from the cars 'were doing the Allied cause harm as they were immobilizing many useful German vehicles which Twenty-first Army Group needed as extra transport in their next big jump to the Seine. Such selfish individualism,' says Captain Peter Simonds, 'is perhaps the partial answer to France's decline and her surprising collapse in the war.'

Nevertheless, the Normandy villagers were not by any means the only looters. 'Take anything you can drive,' the G.I.s of the 359th Regiment were told that Monday morning. 'In a frantic scouring of the fields,' says one report, 'the "take" included 35 fine cavalry horses, 25 automobiles and trucks including one 1939 Studebaker President, converted into a truck and driven away by Privates Stanley Grabowski and Charlie Fuhrman. It was a gay happy convoy that moved south that day to the cheers of the French lining the roads.'

But the horses above all emitted a stench of pestilence: 2,000 horses killed; 3,000 more 'taken prisoner'. In the courtyard of Morellec farm there were 38 horses in piles of 7 and 8. From the Mesnil-Liard road junction to the Sainte-Eugenie road, 82 dead horses with their vehicles blocked the road for 2 kilometres. Heaps of 70 to 80 beasts remained rotting in the hot sun until November 1st. The Allied troops declared the Dives plain an "unhealthy zone" for two months and received orders to by-pass it, not without ensuring the population every day for three months its ration of clean drinking water brought by truck from Caen.

At Saint Lambert-sur-Dives, to avoid risk of an epidemic, bulldozers were used to dig a mass grave 75 feet deep in which, according to a Canadian chaplain, nearly 5,000 corpses were thrown.

An eye witness in December 1944 noted that 'every day in the ditches and bushes we found corpses or rather skeletons.'

Many years after the war the visitor to this country would come across graves with a cross and a helmet bearing the epitaph: 'Unknown German soldier'.

On the small station square at Trun, twenty-eight months after the battle, a pile of tanks, trucks, machine-guns, vehicles and equipment of all kinds collected during the clearing of the streets could be seen.

Today many of the leading citizens regret that they did not collect from the Falaise pocket a few characteristic souvenirs of the battle waged on their soil. But the scrap merchants arrived buying old iron by the ton; the pastures were cleared of the last wrecked Panzers which, until 1961, adorned the verges of certain roads.

The triple-single Bailey bridge on the D13 at Mandeville.

Eighteen years later, in 1962, a Franco-German Commission was still functioning in Bourg Saint-Leonard, exploring every yard of grass, every footpath, interrogating eye witnesses, exhuming here and there, checking the dead from lists of the units engaged to give them names.

That year, some of the members of this commission arrived map in hand at a farm north of Saint-Lambert. The farmers who had guests had decided to eat outside and the tablecloth was laid on the ground under four apple trees. The officials apologized for disturbing their party; but the timetable was tight and the map coordinates had been determined in advance. Some Germans had been buried "under the table cloth". They had to check and exhume the bodies. The guests protested but eventually gave way. The tablecloth was removed and the spades went into action. The map had been right!

Left: Sergeant Midgley stopped at Occagnes on August 22 to photograph this crossroad scene; a German motorcyclist lies dead on the corner. Above: The corner post had disappeared and the road sign had been replaced when we took our comparison.

Falaise 1975

We made two visits to the Falaise area during the preparation of this story. Our first in November, 1974, comprised a wide sweeping tour to take in as many as possible of the towns and villages which were contested during the fighting. St. Lo, Mortain and Avranches were omitted as these battles will all be covered separately in future issues as, in themselves, they warrant detailed treatment. We have selected the date of August 6 to begin our story as it was on this date that the first movements began which led to the final encirclement of the two German Armies.

Some towns were very badly destroyed and great credit is due to the French for the painstaking reconstruction work. Falaise itself, particularly strikes the visitor in the extent of its new buildings but as our photographs show, comparisons are still possible. Quite by chance we were able to trace Madame Guillou and her daughter Madame Capelle who feature prominently in one photograph taken in Falaise in 1944. However, even they could not remember where the picture had been taken. It was only after a visit to see the Mayor (who has himself completed a history on Falaise) that we discovered we had been walking up the road several times each day during our stay—our hotel is now located where the tree stood!

At Bons-Tassilly, although we realised the church had been completely rebuilt, nothing seemed to match—until we realised that the 1944 Canadian picture had been printed back to front. During the lifetime of After the Battle this is the third time that we have had a photograph printed in reverse. Naturally being able to visit the locations and check we have always been able to correct this, but the editor has noticed some bad technical errors in other books and publications where photographs have been reproduced without any verification being made. In this instance we have printed the photograph in reverse as supplied to us with our comparison the correct way round.

The photographs at Tinchebray, Vassy, Flers, Athis, Pont Erambour, Putanges and Argentan were all easy comparisons to match. At Rouvres, incredibly, the church is still being repaired and the old approach road to the 1944 Bailey bridge can still be seen today.

Jennifer, the editor's wife, who does an excellent job at map reading, quite by chance directed us down a small lane near Necy, just off the N158 Falaise-Argentan road. There, almost at once, we came on the location of a series of pictures taken by Sergeant Mapham on August 21, 1944, but uncaptioned as to the area, showing wrecked German tanks and transport. It was difficult to reconcile the 1944 photographs showing the wreckage and destruction with the peaceful country scene before us. Was anything left to remind the modern visitor what had happened? The broken arm to the road sign, visible in 1944, had gone but . . . there at our feet in the ditch was the broken sign. We could not believe our eyes!

On the northern side of the N179, just past the railway bridge outside Vimoutiers, we found what is probably the most spectacular tourist attraction of the area, the Pzkpfw 6 Tiger 1.

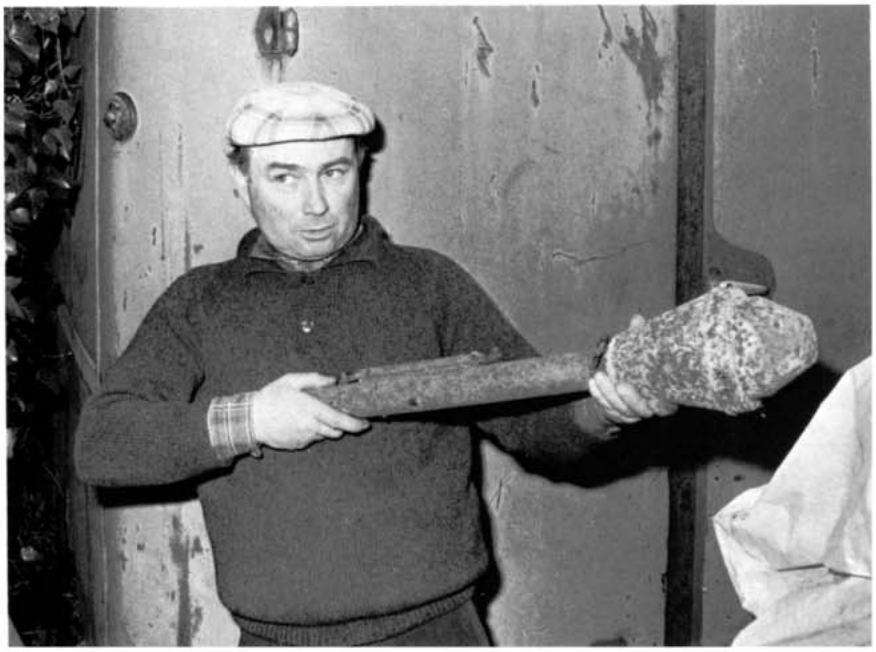
Believed to have belonged to the 203rd Panzer Abteilung (an SS unit under Army command), it was one of five heavy German tanks blocking the route south from Vimoutiers to Gace. However the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Canadian Division had advanced on Vimoutiers from the west through Vimer (where the tanks had been based) and, against little opposition, had reached the town on August 21. The Tiger and its companions (two by the railway embankment, and two Pzkpfw 3s higher up the road) by-passed by the Canadians, were abandoned. The Tiger was pushed to the edge of the road and left.

The Pzkpfw 6 Tiger 1 at Vimoutiers. Our armour expert Chris Hodrien comments on the unusual road wheels which are normally plain dished wheels. Today the tank is slowly sliding down the bank. Below: Our aerial shot of the Trun scrapyard.

Whilst the others were removed over the years, this one remained at the side of the road, slowly slipping down the embankment towards a lane at the bottom. It had been purchased by M. Morat but it was left as it was, becoming almost a permanent feature of the landscape. Shortly after M. Morat died, the wife of M. Michel Dufresne was returning to the family home at Vimer after a day's shopping. Passing the Tiger, to her horror she saw it surrounded by oxygen bottles and cutting equipment—the Tiger was being cut down to size! Her husband was appalled when he heard the news and immediately went to see the Mayor of Vimoutiers. Meanwhile Eddy Florentin had telephoned the Ministry of War in Paris who ordered the sale of the tank to the scrap merchants to be stopped. On the Mayor's authority, the wreck was purchased by the town for NF 6000 (approximately £600) and is now classed as a historical monument.

Time was short on our first visit and some pictures still needed to be taken. We had also heard about further tank wreckage at Trun. A further visit was therefore planned for February 1975. This also gave us time to have published in French newspapers certain pictures for which precise captions were not available, to see if any readers recognised their locations. We felt these pictures had to be used, as they portray graphically the death and destruction in the pocket. Although we traced Captain Knight (still working in the Ministry of Defence, London), who was second in command of 5 Section of the Army Film and Photographic Unit and who took the photographs in 1944, he could not remember where he had taken them, so there was an additional incentive to trace the locations.

At this stage Eddy Florentin, author of one of the finest books on the battle comprising many eye witness and personal accounts, put the editor in touch with Monsieur Gerard Roger at Vimoutiers. In the company of a friend (more about him later), M. Roger spent many days touring with the pictures, until, a week before our second visit, he wrote to say they had found the locations. He also offered himself and his friend as our guides, a suggestion to which we readily agreed.



The incredible Alain Roudeix with a Panzerfaust recovered from the Falaise battlefield.

ENTER MONSIEUR ALAIN ROUDEIX . . .

When we met Gerard Roger we were introduced to Alain Roudeix. In all the locations we have visited we have usually been fortunate in meeting a local expert with a close personal knowledge of the battle; Alain Roudeix has been awarded by the editor, the title of 'Expert of Experts'. Never have we met anybody with more intimate knowledge of events of thirty years ago, but, what is more important, retaining a clear memory of those events today.

Over the next three days, we were told and shown so much that we hope our photographs do a little justice to Alain Roudeix and his incredible collection.

During the early years of the war, M. Roudeix fought the Germans in the Maquis, but, by 1944, he had returned to Vimoutiers and obtained work on a farm in the area. He was, therefore, an eye witness to the battle. At the end of the war he was employed by the French Government on mine clearance. At the same time, being interested in what is now termed as 'militaria' he had the ideal opportunity to begin his collection from the material then littering the area. Gradually the pocket was cleared of discarded and abandoned equipment—a sizeable proportion finding its way into Alain Roudeix's collection. His yard is beyond description. German helmets 'two a franc' are everywhere and garages and outbuildings are crammed with uniforms, vehicles and equipment of all descriptions. Nowadays his collection grows by skilful use of his eyes and an ex U.S. Army mine detector.

Though we had attempted to look for relics during our first visit, we had not been successful. Cultivated fields, trimmed ditches, rebuilt villages all go to indicate to the casual visitor that nothing is left today—M. Roudeix proved to us that it depends where you look.

On one of our photographic drives with 'Roger and Roudeix' we stopped and were led to a section of forest not one hundred yards from the Vimoutiers-Chambois road. There, as if the battle had only finished yesterday, amid water filled mortar craters lay boots, holsters, magazines; all the paraphernalia and accoutrements associated with war, including grenades and ammunition etc. Here we must give our readers a word of warning before they scurry off to Falaise, on the great danger inherent in exploring uncleared battlefields. Where one finds equipment, one will also find grenades, mines and shells, which we did. We had the advantage of Alain Roudeix's intimate knowledge of mine clearance. After thirty years of deterioration, the identity of items found proves a problem. With German stick grenades for example, the wooded handle has usually rotted, likewise the tin casing. One is left with an egg-shaped, rusted object which is highly dangerous. Alain Roudeix knew exactly how to handle each one we found and these were set aside to be collected by the authorities. Much as it is fun to discover relics, and the editor does not mean to be a kill-joy in advising against private searches, it is a fact that French children are still killed and maimed today by just such relics. Please accept the editor's advice that it is just not worth losing a hand or foot, or worst still getting killed. The editor feels it his duty, therefore, not to disclose the exact locations we visited.

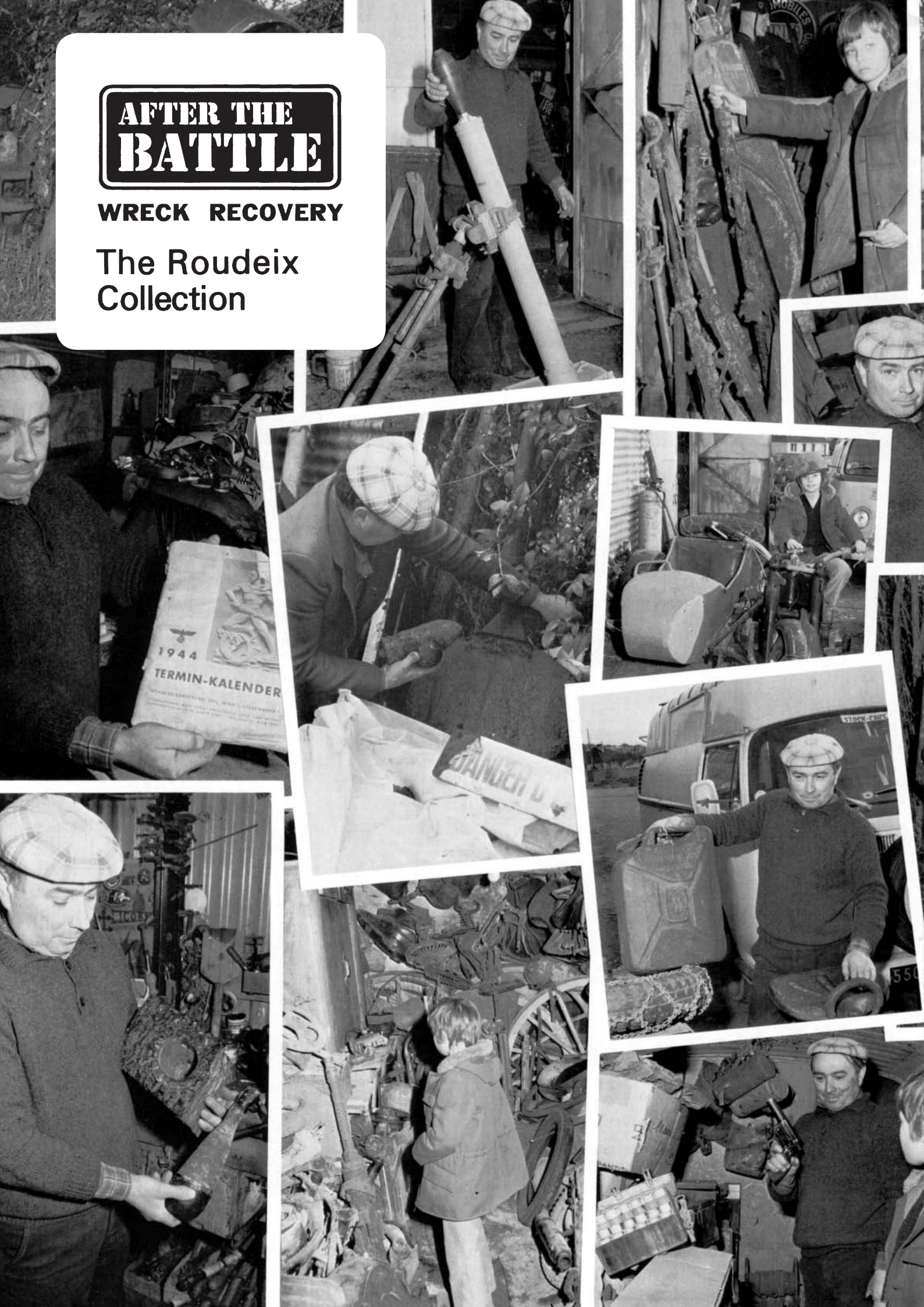
Near Tournai-sur-Dives we visited a dump, where the rubble and contents of the destroyed village was taken. Here modern household refuse is mingled with the bones of horses (one bone we found complete with bullet hole), bridles, horse gas masks, boots and shells.

German equipment we found: Top, paratrooper's boot. Centre, part of a holster and, above, a water bottle, one of three we discovered. Below: Watching 'the expert' hard at it!

The highlight of our tour was probably visiting locations in the photographs taken by Captain Knight. Proudly, Monsieurs Roger and Roudeix showed us the places they had traced. The first turned out to be on the outskirts of St. Lambert itself, a spot where we had spent some time on our first visit. There we found that Captain Knight must have moved a few hundred yards down the road to Moissy to take the remaining pictures actually in the 'Corridor of Death'. Here, next to the lane leading from Moissy ford, the ploughed field gave us a shattered German helmet, cartridges, shrapnel and other small items. On the banks of the Dives itself, Alain Roudeix's sharp eyes found German radio parts, a German soup bowl and Panzerfaust tubes, living up to the title we had given him.

From here, on a pleasant sunny morning, we moved through the 'Corridor of Death'. Peaceful country paths belying their violent past. Now cleared of all the rubbish which once clogged them, we took our last symbolic picture—turning the clock back thirty years we reconstructed a photograph of Alain Roudeix beside a German grave—same man and same cross on the same spot.

Top and centre: Tank wreckage in Madame Maurat's scrapyard at Trun. Top right: Water filled mortar craters remain on the battlefield still littered with the paraphernalia of war. Above: More relics — left, a Schmeisser magazine and right, a bottle still full of water-purifying liquid. Below: Unwelcome finds—the remains of German grenades.


AFTER THE
BATTLE
WRECK RECOVERY
The Roudeix
Collection
1944
TERMIN-KALENDER

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SS
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AFTER THE BATTLE

IT HAPPENED HERE

Rommel's accident

When the Allies invaded Europe, the man responsible for the coastal defences in northern France was Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel. On Monday July 17, 1944, the Second Tactical Air Force at last caught up with him. To the Allied pilot responsible for strafing Rommel, his car was no different to the thousands of other vehicles being shot up on the roads of Normandy in the weeks after the invasion. Rommel was returning from a visit to the headquarters of SS Oberstgruppenfuhrer Josef (Sepp) Dietrich, Commander of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, at St. Pierre-sur-Dives via the D4 road through Livarot. With him in his Horch staff car, driven by his personal driver, Daniel, was Major Neuhaus, Feldwebel Holke, the observer and Hauptmann Helmuth Lang.

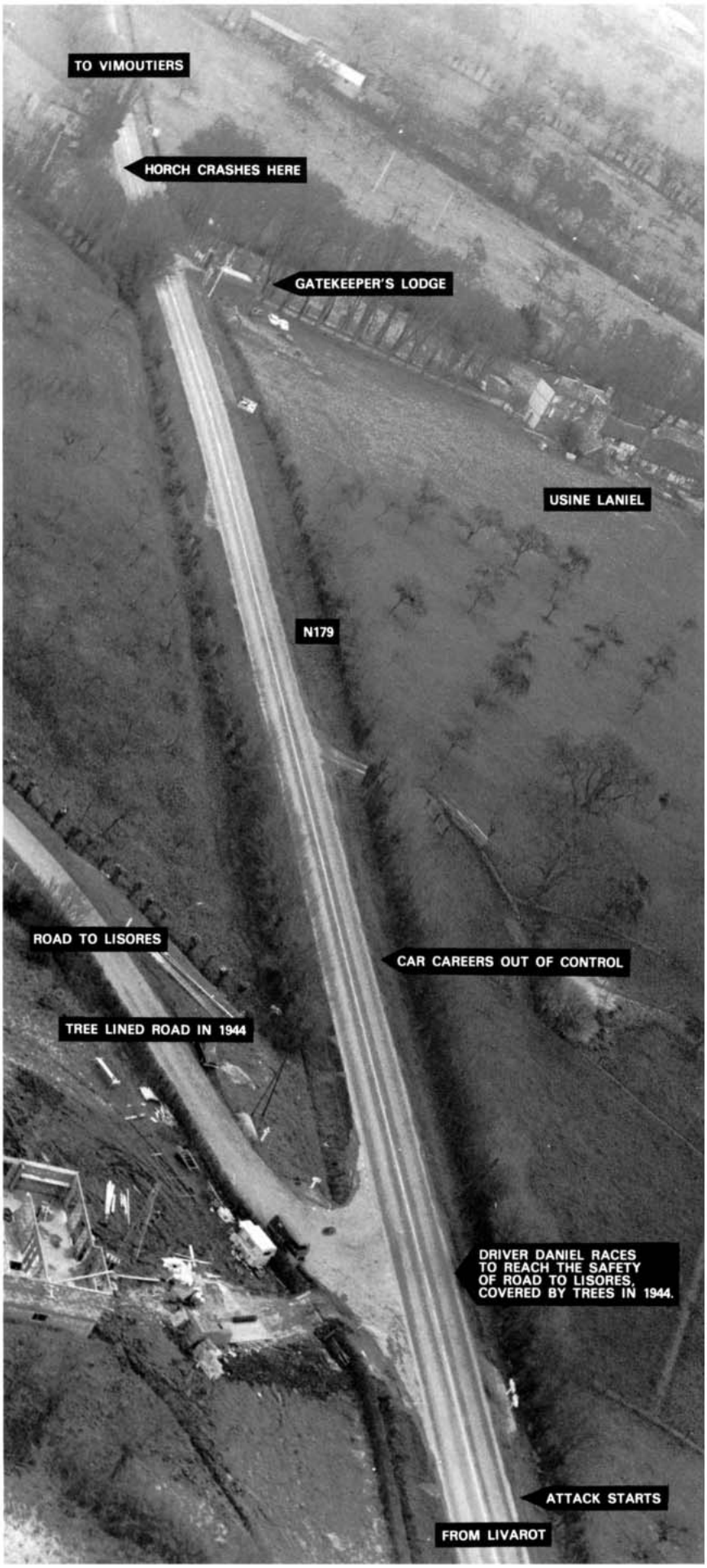
According to Hauptmann Lang, this is what happened:

'About 4 p.m. Marschall Rommel started on the return journey from Dietrich's headquarters. He was anxious to get back to Army Group B headquarters as quickly as possible because the enemy had broken through on another part of the front. We had to be careful of enemy aircraft, which were flying over the battlefield continually and were quickly attracted by dust on the roads.

'All along the road we could see transport in flames: from time to time the enemy bombers forced us to take to second-class roads. About 6 p.m. the Marschall's car was in the neighbourhood of Livarot. Transport which had just been attacked was piled up along the road and strong groups of enemy dive-bombers were still at work close by. That is why we turned off along a sheltered road, to join the main road again two and a half miles from Vimoutiers.

'When we reached it we saw above Livarot about eight enemy dive-bombers. We learnt later that they had been interfering with traffic on the road to Livarot for the past two hours. Since we thought that they had not seen us, we continued along the main road from Livarot to Vimoutiers. Suddenly Feldwebel Holke, our spotter, warned us that two aircraft were flying along the road in our direction. The driver, Daniel, was told to put on speed and turn off on to a little side road to the right, about 300 yards ahead of us, which would give us some shelter.

'Before we could reach it, the enemy aircraft, flying at great speed only a few feet above the road, came up to within 500 yards of us and the first one opened fire. Marschall Rommel was looking back at this moment. The left-hand side of the car was hit by the first burst. A cannon-shell shattered Daniel's left shoulder and left arm. Marschall Rommel was wounded in the face by broken glass and received a blow on the left temple and cheekbone which caused a triple fracture of the skull and made him lose consciousness immediately. Major Neuhaus was struck on the holster of his revolver and the force of the blow broke his pelvis.



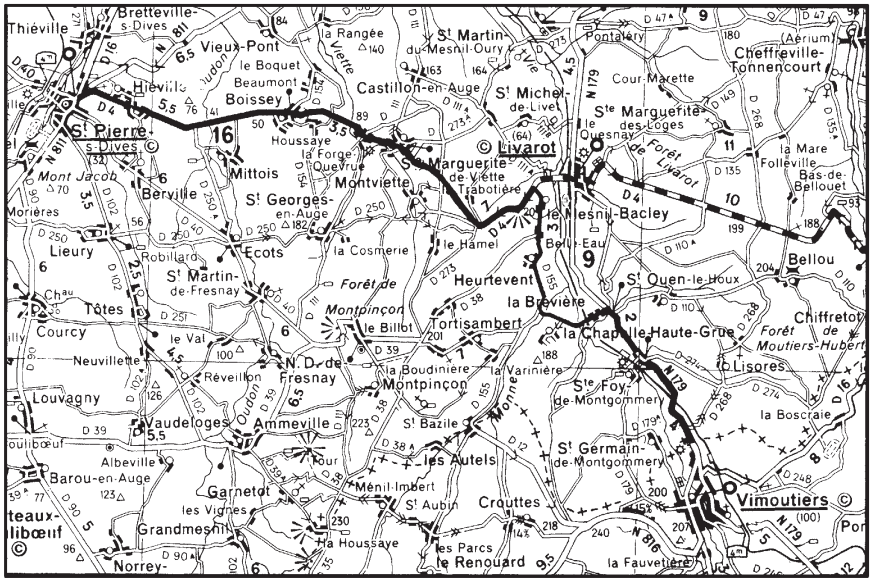
Our aerial photograph reconstruction of the attack by 602 Squadron on Generalfeldmarschall Rommel on July 17, 1944.

'As the result of his serious wounds, Daniel, the driver, lost control of the car. It struck the stump of a tree, skidded over to the left of the road and then turned over in a ditch on the right. Hauptmann Lang and Feldwebel Holke jumped out of the car and took shelter on the right of the road. Marschall Rommel, who, at the start of the attack, had hold of the handle of the door, was thrown out, unconscious, when the car turned over and lay stretched out on the road about twenty yards behind it. A second aircraft flew over and tried to drop bombs on those who were lying on the ground.

'Immediately afterwards, Marschall Rommel was carried into shelter by Hauptmann Lang and Feldwebel Holke. He lay on the ground unconscious and covered with blood, which flowed from the many wounds on his face, particularly from his left eye and mouth. It appeared that he had been struck on the left temple. Even when we had carried him to safety he did not recover consciousness.

'In order to get medical help for the wounded, we tried to find a car. It took about three-quarters of an hour to do so. Marschall Rommel had his wounds dressed by a French doctor in a religious hospital. They were very severe and the doctor said that there was little hope of saving his life. Later he was taken, still unconscious, with Daniel to an air-force hospital at Bernay, about 25 miles away. The doctors there diagnosed severe injuries to the skull — a fracture at the base, two fractures on the temple and the cheek-bone destroyed, a wound in the left eye, wounds from glass and concussion. Daniel died during the night, in spite of a blood transfusion.'

The attack is credited (in the official RAF history) to pilots of No. 602 Squadron (City of Glasgow), then operating from a temporary advanced landing ground B11 on the cliff-top near Longues battery. Bruce Robertson in 'Spitfire—the story of a Famous Fighter' goes further and credits the strafing to 602 Squadron's South African Squadron Leader, J. J. Le Roux, DFC. The editor has examined the combat reports submitted by Squadron Leader Le Roux for July 17, 1944; no mention is made of attacking a staff car, yet such an attack is mentioned in the Squadron Operations Book. We have reproduced the relative page from the Operations Book for readers to see for themselves. Either way, it seems that 602 Squadron share the glory of putting Rommel out of action at such a critical stage of the battle.



Top: Rommel's believed route from St. Pierre-sur-Dives. The dotted line shows the route he would have taken if Livarot had not been under aerial attack. Reproduced by permission from Michelin Maps No. 55 and 60, edition 12/1972. Above: Rommel with 'Sepp' Dietrich (who also had his car strafed) in Normandy in 1944 (Associated Press). Below: The pilots of 602 Squadron photographed exactly 10 days after the attack. Squadron Leader Le Roux is standing third from the right (IWM).

of (Unit or Formation) NO 602 Squadron. No. of pages used for day

Summary of Events SECRET.

12 aircraft on an armed recce south of the lines, 4 carrying bombs. Near Flers the Squadron Leader 's section bounced 6 M.E.109's flying at 4000 ft. S/LDR LE ROUX made an attack on one M.E. before he could fire the enemy a/c broke spun into the ground and burst into flames. He attacked another from 200 yds scored strikes all over, but only claims a DAMAGED. He also destroyed a staff car and a motor cyclist.

F/O B.J.OLIVER (.N.Z.41930) destroyed a truck and a staff car with his b omb and also s scored a staff car - flamer and two smokers with his cannon and mags. near Falaise.

F/LT A.R.STEWART and F/SGT FRANCIS scored sa truck and trailer - smoker near Flers.

F/O G.L.ROBINSON destroyed a truck near Flers and had a head on attack with a ME109, but did not hit him. Aspi rant REMLINGER (F.F30801) destroyed a motor cyclist and damaged a truck. Near Argentan SGT DOWNEY damaged a truck. Just S.E. of Argentan F/LT MANSON was going down to make an attack on M.T. when he was hit by flak. His No 2 - Sgt Downey, states that white smoke was coming from his engine. F/Lt Manson was seen to carry out a normal crash landing, but his machine appeared to be travelling too fast, as it plou ghed

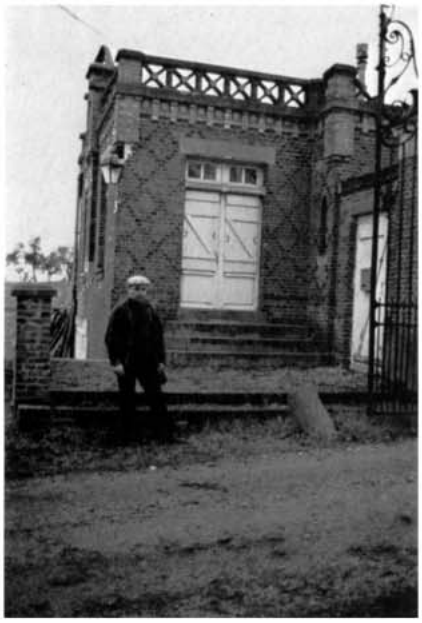
Naturally Hauptmann Lang's account, being a passenger in the car, has been accepted by historians as being what actually happened. However, if one tries to follow the route described by Hauptmann Lang, it is difficult to reconcile this with the roads in the area — a fact which disturbed our friend Gerard Roger who has lived in the area all his life. In addition, Alain Roudeix had been working at the time not far from the N179, the Livarot-Vimoutiers road, repairing fences, and had witnessed the attack. When he returned to Vimoutiers, passing a group of houses called la Gosselinaie, he saw the wrecked Horch in the ditch and a group of Germans, one with his arm blown off (Daniel the driver), gathered around the entrance to the Usine Laniel. He was asked by the Germans where the nearest hospital was situated. The nearest town, Vimoutiers, only two kilometres away did not have a hospital and Alain Roudeix suggested a pharmacy at Livarot, eight kilometres in the opposite direction. (Remember Lang's account incorrectly mentions a religious hospital).

In 1970, the opportunity came for Gerard Roger to set the record straight as Hauptmann Lang, then living in West Germany, was planning to make a return visit to Normandy. In the company of Alain Roudeix he went with Helmuth Lang to la Gosselinaie. There Lang realised he had given an incorrect route in his report on the incident. The roads were crowded; they were in constant danger from aircraft; it was an understandable mistake.

We were taken to the scene by the famous two 'Roger and Roudeix', in February 1975. There we walked along the road, still the same width as in 1944, to where the attack started. Then we passed the turning on the left, which in 1944 was covered with trees and to which Daniel was racing for cover. Attacked before they could reach the lane, the car swerved down the hill crashing into a tree (since removed) on the left hand side of the road by a bridge over a tributary of the River Vie. Nearby, at the gatekeeper's lodge to the Usine Laniel, Alain Roudeix pointed out where he had seen Rommel. We then went to Livarot to see the pharmacy where he had been taken together with Daniel, now a modern chemist shop. Later we visited the hospital at Bernay where Rommel occupied Room 9.

The following day in a 1944 Piper Cub the editor restaged the path of the flight of the 602 Squadron Spitfire IX, along the N179. Instead of bullets raining down, the editor's glasses blew off and soon afterwards a continental breakfast followed! In spite of this rather ignominious end, our photograph came out well and is reproduced here.

Above: Extract from the 602 Squadron operation log book for July 17. Crown copyright. Reproduced by permission of H.M.S.O. Below: Alain Roudeix stands on the spot where the Horch crashed into the tree, which has since been removed. Opposite, the Usine Laniel.



Above: Alain Roudeix outside the gatekeepers hut where he saw Rommel wounded in 1944.

Above: Helmuth Lang (second from left) with Alain Roudeix revisits the Usine Laniel in 1970 (Ouest-France).

Above: Squadron Leader 'Chris' Le Roux, D.F.C. and 2 bars; with 23½ 'kills' to his credit, the top scoring British pilot since D-Day over Normandy. He left on a flight to England on August 29, 1944 and, tragically, never arrived (IWM).

Centre: The Pharmacy in Livarot (now a chemist shop) where Rommel was first taken. He was then transferred to the hospital at Bernay, photo above, where he occupied Room 9, photo right.

THE CONFEDERATE AIR FORCE

BY GORDON RILEY

AFTER THE BATTLE

PRESERVATION

'The Confederate Air Force is a patriotic organization dedicated to the preservation of the World's greatest combat aircraft . . . 1939-1945.' This introduction to the CAF handbook adequately sums up the aims of this remarkable organization but only a visit to their headquarters can convey the true meaning of the statement. Gathered together at 'Rebel Field', Harlingen, Texas, is the most comprehensive collection of flyable WWII aircraft in the World.

As with most enterprises the CAF started from humble beginnings. During the 1950s, a group of pilots obtained a war-surplus P-51D Mustang fighter which they proceeded to fly for the fun of it. Soon the group expanded and acquired another fighter, this time an ex-US Navy F-8F Bearcat and it was decided that it might be a good idea to try to build up a collection of American fighter aircraft. That was where the problems began.

The major drawback was that there were very few aircraft still in anything like air-

Top: Six P-47 Thunderbolts of the Confederate Air Force flying over Rebel Field on February 25, 1974, painted in the markings of prominent WWII combat units, was the result of a five year restoration project. The aircraft were returned to the USA from Peru in 1969. Above: Curtis SB2C-5 Helldiver, registration N92879, operated by Colonel Bob Griffin.

The home of the Ghost Squadron. Lower right: Bomb Wing hanger. Lower left: Indoor museum, offices and CAF officers' Club. Upper right: Fighter Wing hanger. Centre: Maintenance hanger. Top left: Static display area.

worthy condition, even though WWII had only been over for ten years. Many famous types including the P-40 Warhawk, F6F Hellcat, P-38 Lightning and SBD Dauntless were apparently extinct or very nearly so. The group's first reaction was one of horror and then one of determination to save these precious warbirds before it was too late.

Disposal bases were toured all over the USA, including giant establishments such at Litchfield Park Naval Air Station and the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. The story was the same everywhere; war-surplus aircraft, some virtually brand-new, were still being sent to the smelter with no apparent attempt at preservation by the military authorities.

The Confederate Air Force officially came into being on September 6, 1961, when it was chartered as a non-profit Texas corporation with membership limited to 500 regular officers. Since that time the fame of the CAF has spread to world-wide proportions and the membership limit is no longer enforced, current active membership being in excess of 1,000. Anyone can now enrol in the CAF, annual membership fee being $125 for the first year and $100 thereafter. Licensed mechanics are particularly welcome and for them the fees are reduced to $50 and $25. All members are commissioned in the rank of Colonel.

The CAF collection of WWII American fighters was completed by 1963, and comprised a P-38 Lightning, P-40 Warhawk, P-51D Mustang, F4F Wildcat, F6F Hellcat, F8F Bearcat, F4U Corsair, P-39 Aircobra, P-63 Kingcobra and P-47N Thunderbolt. Many had been imported from overseas as they could not be found within the USA; the Kingcobra came from Honduras and the Thunderbolt from Nicaragua. Out of the ten aircraft nine were airworthy, the tenth, the Aircobra, eventually succumbed to the efforts of Colonel Don Hull who took four years to rebuild it to flying condition. Don runs his own restoration business and has since recovered six Mustangs from Guatemala, rebuilt a Spitfire IX (once displayed in Andover, Hampshire) and taken part in the restoration of the CAF's PBY-5A Catalina, acquired from the Royal Danish Air Force.

It would be reasonable to assume that with the fighter collection complete the officers of the CAF would have sat back and congratulated themselves; not so! They now started talking about BOMBERS too. Medium bombers like the Havoc, Mitchell and Invader at first, then the Fortress,

Grumman FM-2 Wildcat registered as N681S, is painted to represent an aircraft operating from the aircraft carrier 'USS Ranger'.

Liberator and, unbelievably, a SUPERFORTRESS! The decision was taken to attempt to acquire *all* types of US combat aircraft and then the brief was extended to include Allied types and finally, Axis aircraft. The CAF was to attempt to build up a complete collection of WWII combat types, or at least as many as were still available.

By the time the bombers started to arrive it became obvious that 'Rebel Field', then situated at Mercedes, Texas, was just too small, its 2,900 ft runway could not handle aircraft of the size and weight of a B-17 or B-24, so a new base had to be found. Luckily, the fame of the CAF was beginning to spread, and in 1968 they received an invitation to set up their headquarters at the new International Airport at Harlingen, a few miles down the road. Harlingen Airport had previously been occupied by USAAF and USAF training units and one of their hangars was made available to the CAF. Needless to say the CAF took up the opportunity to expand and now have three hangars at their new 'Rebel Field', one for bombers, another for fighters, and a third for maintenance. Over 76,000 square feet are available under cover and a fourth hanger is contemplated to house the rapidly growing collection.

By 1971 capital investment at Harlingen had exceeded $700,000, the Fighter Hangar alone costing $57,000, and the concrete ramp area (more than 40 acres) was becoming populated by relatively modern Air Force and Navy surplus types, which are donated free on the condition that they will not be flown. Types in this giant 'parking lot' include a Boeing RB-47 Stratojet, Convair F-102 Delta Dagger, Martin RB-57 Canberra and Republic F-84F Thunderjet.

Above: Boeing B-17G Fortress in an incredible colour scheme of light green with dark green splodges! Below: A nice line up — in the foreground, a Lockhead P-38 Lightning, centre, an ex Battle of Britain film Messerschmitt and top, a North American P-51 Mustang.

Not only is it expensive to equip the field with hangars and maintenance facilities, but it costs a good deal to operate a WWII combat aircraft. A fighter can be operated by a single person or a small group, but an aircraft like a Fortress is a different matter, costing some $500 per hour just in fuel alone. To meet these considerable running costs the CAF forms Maintenance Squadrons for each aircraft. Membership of a squadron costs perhaps $500 per share and the members are then eligible to fly in 'their' particular aircraft as crew or pilots, depending on their qualifications.

As a result of the increasing national and international interest, it has become necessary to create a number of detached 'Wings', which are based away from Rebel Field, so that members in another area have the opportunity to work on CAF aircraft without having to travel hundreds, or maybe thousands, of miles. There are currently six CAF Wings with more being contemplated. Those established are:

Harlingen, Texas	Headquarters Wing
Galveston, Texas	Gulf Coast Wing
Hobbs, New Mexico	New Mexico Wing
Minneapolis, Minnesota	Southern Minnesota Wing
Fort Worth, Texas	Dallas-Fort Worth Wing
San Marcos, Texas	Central Texas Wing

The struggles which the CAF have gone through in their attempts to complete their collection are truly amazing, with aircraft being flown across the Atlantic—the de Havilland Mosquito for instance—and, in some cases, almost literally brought back from the dead. When it was decided to acquire a B-29 Superfortress in 1966 it looked as though the CAF had come up against a brick wall. The USAF Logistics Command searched their records only to find that none were stored anywhere within America. The likelihood of finding a complete example anywhere else looked bleak but then a pilot reported flying over a number of parked B-29s at the US Navy Weapons Centre, China Lake, California.

The USAF was contacted again and presented with the evidence of 85 B-29s parked at China Lake. The Logistics Command still denied their existence but said that should the US Navy have any B-29s surplus to their requirements then the CAF could have their pick. This was an offer not to be refused and a team led by Jack Kern of Aero Service International was contracted to handle the restoration, together with two CAF members, Duane Egli and J. A. McCafferty. Colonel Victor N. Agather, who had served on the development staff of the B-29, was the chief sponsor.

The aircraft had been parked in the California desert for 17 years and many had been used as targets for new weapons, but some were still in a remarkable state of preservation and the best one, serial 44-62090, was eventually chosen. Work started on the restoration on March 31, 1971 and over the next nine weeks the aircraft was overhauled from stem to stern. All hydraulic and electrical systems were thoroughly checked and all suspect piping and wiring renewed. The flying controls were overhauled and the instruments removed, checked and re-installed. Once this had been accomplished the engines were test-run and the undercarriage tested for retraction. New plexiglass was installed in the windows and on August 2, 1971 the B-29 was ready to go.

Randy Sohn lifted the Superfort off from China Lake loaded down with spare parts cannibalised from other B-29s and 6 hrs 38 mins later the aircraft touched down at Rebel Field after a non-stop flight of 1,480 miles during which no mechanical problems were discovered at all. That was the only flight of the B-29 (now registered as a civil aeroplane, N4249) until late 1974. Up to August 1974, when the author visited Rebel Field, over $40,000 had been spent on restoring it to flying condition, engine runs had been completed and it was ready for its first test flight. The B-29 was due to star in the CAF's September air display at Harlingen, when it was hoped to simulate an atomic attack using dynamite and flour!

The story of the B-29 is typical of the many other stories associated with the 60-plus aircraft of the CAF made up from over 35 types. The six P-47D Thunderbolts retrieved from Peru by Ed Jurist, the two Spitfires and a Mosquito from the UK, the four Spanish-built Messerschmitt 109s from the film 'Battle of Britain'—the list is almost endless.

The aircraft are now known as the 'Ghost Squadron' of the Confederate Air Force and their fame has spread across the US and beyond since the memorable occasion at 'Transpo 72', held at Dulles Airport, Washington, DC. The 'Ghost Squadron' roared in from Texas with twenty warbirds and proceeded to demonstrate them twice a day for the next ten days.

The CAF is still collecting more and more aircraft to add to its fleet. It is understood that a Gloster Meteor TT.20 has just been obtained from the RAF and that a CAF aerobatic formation team is being formed which will fly three scarlet-painted Cherokee 400s, rather sedate for the CAF, but, nevertheless, spectacular. In the words of Lieutenant-General Tom Gerrity when he dedicated the first museum building at Mercedes, ' . . . you ain't seen nothing yet'.

THE CONFEDERATE AIR FORCE AIRWORTHY AIRCRAFT

Beech C-45J Expediter	N79AG
Bell P-39Q Aircobra*	N6968
Bell P-63 Kingcobra	N191H
Boeing PT-17 Kaydet	N727E
Boeing N2S-3 Kaydet	N66004
Boeing B-17G Fortress	N3676G
Boeing B-29 Superfortress	N4249
Consolidated C-87 Liberator	N12905
Consolidated PBY-5A Catalina	N15KL
Curtiss P-40N Warhawk	N1226N
Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver	N92879
de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito 35	N9797
Douglas A-20 Havoc*	N67921
Douglas A-26B Invader	N6101C
Douglas A-26B Invader	N320
Douglas C-47 Skytrain	N491P
Douglas SBD-3 Dauntless	N54532
Douglas B-23 Dragon	N62G
Fairchild PT-19 Cornell	N48252
Fairchild PT-26 Cornell	N4732G
Goodyear FG-1D Corsair	N9964Z
Grumman F6F Hellcat	N1078Z
Grumman F8F-3 Bearcat	N825C
Grumman FM-2 Wildcat	N681S
Grumman TBM-3E Avenger	N6583D
Hisp. HA.1112-M1L (Me Bf 109)	N9938
Hisp. HA.1112-M1L (Me Bf 109)	N9939
Hisp. HA.1112-M1L (Me Bf 109)	N8575
Hisp. HA.1112-M1L (Me Bf 109)	N109ME
Lockheed L-18 Lodestar	N30N
Lockheed P-38L Lightning	N345
Lockheed P-38L Lightning	N257
Lockheed P-38L Lightning	N38LL
Martin B-26C Marauder* *	N5546N
North American B-25J Mitchell	N3676G
North American B-25N Mitchell	N201L
North American B-25N Mitchell	N3161G
North American B-25N Mitchell	N9494Z
North American P-51C Mustang	N9288
North American P-51D Mustang	N5428V
North American P-51D Mustang	N10601
North American F-28B Twin Mustang*	N12102
North American AT-6A Texan	N9790Z
North American AT-6A Texan	N3246G
North American AT-6A Texan ("Kate" replica)	N3239G
North American AT-6A Texan ("Kate" replica)	N9097
North American AT-6A Texan	N6298C
North American AT-6A Texan ("Zero" replica)	N4447
North American AT-6A Texan ("Zero" replica)	N11171
North American AT-6A Texan ("Zero" replica)	N15799
North American AT-6A Texan ("Zero" replica)	N15797
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DA
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DB
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DC
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DD
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DE
Republic P-47D Thunderbolt	N47DF
Republic P-47N Thunderbolt	N47TB
Ryan PT-22 Recruit	N22AL
Ryan PT-22 Recruit	N48742
Vickers Supermarine Spitfire IX	N238V
Vickers Supermarine Spitfire IX	N1882
Vultee BT-13 ("Val" replica)	N2200S
Vultee BT-13	N56336
Vultee BT-15 Valiant	N75004
Waco CGA-4 glider	—

The replica Japanese aircraft were built for the film "Tora Tora Tora", the German for 'Battle of Britain'.

* Under restoration * * Non-airworthy

AFTER THE BATTLE

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Admiral Yamamoto and his G4M 'Betty'

The highly successful ambush of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, 59-year-old Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Imperial Fleet and brilliant architect of the Pearl Harbour attack, was due to the fact that the Americans knew exactly where his aircraft was scheduled to be on April 18, 1943. Unknown to the Japanese, their Naval code had been broken shortly before the Battle of Midway and the Admiral's morale-boosting and fact-finding tour of Japanese units on Bougainville in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific presented a unique opportunity to deny the enemy of one of his most gifted military planners. The main problem was range; Bougainville was 320 miles from the 339th Fighter Squadron's base on Guadalcanal, a distance that would be extended to some 435 miles by the need to avoid Japanese-held islands *en route*.

By working round the clock, USAAF ground crews fitted the P-38s with the necessary long-range tanks, and at 7.25 a.m. American time on Sunday, April 18, the first Lightning took off, piloted by Major John W. Mitchell.

Two P-38s had to abort the mission early on and 16 set course for the rendezvous with the Yamamoto formation. Strict radio silence was to be observed until the enemy aircraft were sighted.

Yamamoto's Mitsubishi G4M 'Betty', its sister aircraft and the escort of six A6M 'Zeke' fighters took off from Rabaul at 6.00 a.m. for the flight to Bougainville. The Japanese staff officers were on time on this leg of their itinerary and it was this very punctuality that was to contribute to the death of Yamamoto. The Americans knew his scheduled time of arrival at Ballale Island off Bougainville, the first stop on the tour. By estimating the speed of the Japanese aircraft, Mitchell put the Admiral's ETA at the interception point at 9.35 a.m. It was to prove correct.

The Lightnings were divided into four flights of four aircraft. Two machines, piloted by Lieutenants Hine and Holmes, joined the attack section, now composed of Captain Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr and Lieutenant Rex T. Barber. These four aircraft would hit the bombers while the rest observed and kept the Zekes busy.

After an uneventful flight to the target area, the P-38s sighted their quarry at 9.30 a.m. Dropping long-range tanks, Lanphier's section climbed to attack.

As the Lightnings were sighted, the Bettys made the mistake of diving towards the Bougainville jungle, losing the height advantage they had. The speed of the ensuing combat caused some doubt as to exactly which pilot—or pilots—destroyed the Yamamoto bomber. It is most likely that both Barber and Lanphier attacked the aircraft, but little documentary evidence has been found to substantiate or deny this. Also, the gun cameras of the P-38s were empty as no film was available at the time of the mission.

When the wreckage of the Betty that carried Yamamoto was found on Bougainville, it had fin damage and was without its rudder. This damage is specifically mentioned by Barber:

Above: Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto photographed on the bridge of the flagship Nagato. Below: On April 11, 1943, Admiral Yamamoto salutes Navy fighter-bomber pilots about to take off at Rabaul East airfield (Atsushi Hirota).

'I started to shoot at the bomber immediately, pressing my attack to less than a plane's length from him. His rudder and a good portion of his vertical fin came off.'

As Barber had to break off to deal with three Zekes on his tail, he did not see the Betty crash, although his last sight of it was that it was at about 500 feet and trailing smoke, almost inverted. This appears to be substantiated by the only other Japanese survivor, Vice-Admiral Ugaki, who last saw Yamamoto's aircraft 'flying slowly over the jungle, heading south, with bright orange flames rapidly enveloping the wings and fuselage.'

The above accounts are at variance with Lanphier's report, which makes no mention of attacking an already crippled aircraft:

'I began firing a long steady burst across the bomber's line of flight from approximately right angles. Long before I considered myself in range, the bomber's right engine, then his right wing, began to burn.'

Lanphier observed defensive fire from the Betty's rear cannon and moved out of range seconds before the bomber's right wing came

Above: Brigadier-General D. C. Strother pins the Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star on Captain Thomas G. Lanphier for his part in the attack (USAF). Below: The funeral procession leaves the Suiko-Sha building en route for Hibiya Park (Atsushi Hirota).

off and it dived into the jungle and exploded. The time was 9.34 a.m.

Rescuers on the ground beat out a smouldering undergrowth fire as they attempted to reach Yamamoto's aircraft. His devoted aide found the charred corpse still strapped in its seat—his chin on his Samurai sword. Only one other person could be identified, Admiral Takata. Later it was established that Yamamoto was dead before the aircraft crashed into the jungle—he had been shot through the head and shoulder.

The Japanese admitted his death over a month after the crash on May 21.

The Americans, not wishing to advertise the fact they had broken the Japanese Naval Code, said nothing. Not until VJ Day was the story released.

Captain Lanphier was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star, the others who had flown on the mission received the Navy Air Medal. Additionally Major Mitchell, who led the attack, Captain Lanphier, Lieutenants Hine, Holmes and Barber received the Navy Cross.

After the war Captain Lanphier became a top aircraft and electronics executive assistant to the Air Force Secretary. His claim to have been the one to shoot down Admiral Yamamoto, however, was questioned by Rex Barber, his former wingman, then an insurance agent in Culver, Oregon. The argument goes on with the real reason for Admiral Yamamoto's death being almost forgotten—American Cryptanalysis.

At 5.55 p.m. on April 13, 1943 the commander of the Japanese 8th Fleet broadcast the Admiral's itinerary to the 1st Base Force, the 26th Air Flotilla, commanding officers of the 11th Air Flotilla, the CO of the 958th Air Unit and the chief of the Ballale Defence Unit. Because of the wide number of addresses and the importance of the communication, Japanese high-security code JN25 was used.

However, US Cryptanalysis at FRUPAC—Fleet Radio Unit Pacific Fleet—helped by an IBM punched card system, had cracked the code due to the efforts of its codebreaking unit and the fortunate capture of 200,000 code books from a grounded Japanese submarine on Guadalcanal, although the additive, the key codeword as it were, was changed monthly.

Because of the number of addresses, the message was assumed by the Americans to be of importance and the coded message went to a translator of more than ordinary competence, a Marine Corps Lieutenant-Colonel Alva B. Lasswell who spoke Japanese fluently. Together with two other codebreakers, Lieutenant-Commanders Thomas H. Dyer and Wesley A. Wright, piece by piece they wrote the message down . . . RR for Rabaul . . . RXZ for Ballale . . . RXP for Buin. The completed message read:

The Commander in Chief Combined Fleet will inspect Ballale, Shortland, and Buin in accordance with the following:

1. 0600 depart Rabaul on board medium attack plane (escorted by 6 fighters); 0800 arrive Ballale. Immediately depart for Shortland on board subchaser (1st Base Force to have ready one boat), arriving at 1840. Depart Shortland 0945 aboard said subchaser, arriving Ballale at 1030. (For transportation purposes, have ready an assault boat at Shortland and a motor launch at Ballale.) 1100 depart Ballale on board medium attack plane, arriving Buin at 1110. Lunch at 1st Base Force

Headquarters (Senior Staff Officer of Air Flotilla 26 to be present). 1400 depart Buin aboard medium attack plane; arrive Rabaul at 1540.

2. Inspection Procedures: After being briefed on present status, the troops (patients at 1st Base Force Hospital) will be visited. However, there will be no interruptions in the routine duties of the day.

3. Uniforms will be the uniform for the day except that the commanding officers of the various units will be in combat attire with decorations.

4. In the event of inclement weather, the tour will be postponed one day.

The wreck remained in the jungle on Bougainville. In June 1969 an Australian photographer-journalist, Bruce Adams, set out to try to locate the crashed aircraft. This is his story:

My first call was at Port Moresby where I talked to Bill Chapman of the war museum. Bill told me of the wreck and where it was roughly situated outside Buin on Bougainville. He then produced one of the control columns from Yamamoto's plane which had been given to him for the museum.

From Port Moresby I flew to Lae where I was told that the other control column was owned by the '183 Independent Helicopter Reconnaissance Flight' of the Pacific Islands Regiment.

I then flew on to Rabaul and spoke to Father Church of the Catholic Mission at Kokopo, a few miles from Rabaul. Father Church had walked in to the aircraft a few months previously and had souvenired the identification plate. As far as I could tell, Yamamoto's aircraft was spread through-out the Pacific, a piece here, a piece there. But very few people had seen the actual wreck in the jungle.

Two days later I flew to Buin on Bougainville. We landed on an old Japanese wartime airstrip and from there I could see the small township a few miles away. Several miles from there is Kahili airstrip—the one Yamamoto was flying to when he was shot down.

Kahili is a vast open strip of ground with small weeds covering the area. A United Churches Mission stands at one end of a large white cross on the field, in remembrance of those who never returned. Bomb holes pit the side of the strip and the surrounding plantations are scarred from bombing and machine-gunning.

Even the township of Buin has been moved eight miles in from the coast. A few big Japanese naval guns and a native TB hospital are all that is left of the old wartime town site.

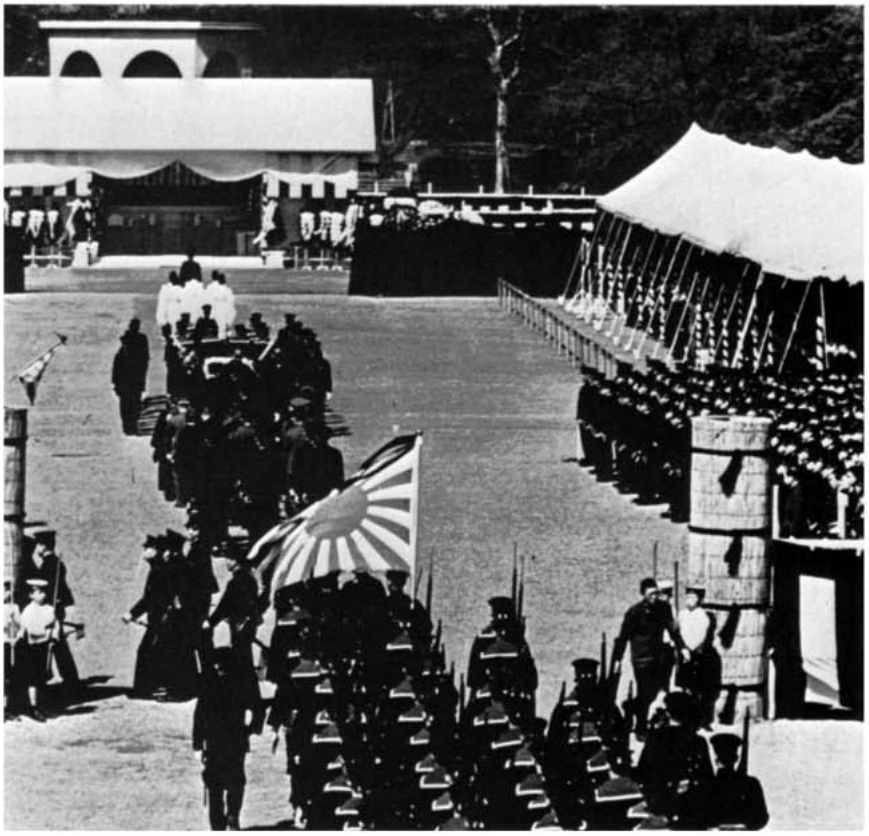
At Buin I contacted the assistant district commissioner, Malcolm Lang. He has spent several years in the Buin area, but had not actually been out to see the wreckage I was after. Last year, he told me, a photographer from the Japanese Government arrived in Buin and asked to be taken to the wrecked plane. He was escorted there, returned with his pictures and then went back to Japan. His sole purpose and mission had been to photograph the wreckage of Yamamoto's aircraft.

The following day, Friday, June 13, Malcolm Lang assigned a native policeman of the Papuan New Guinea Constabulary to take me to a village fifteen miles away where we might be able to obtain a guide.

The policeman and I bumped over a so-called road to a small village called Kokopo (not to be confused with the township of Kokopo near Rabaul), where we stopped our vehicle and were instantly surrounded by natives. Then the policeman took over—he spoke in the native dialect to the crowd for about twenty minutes.

We learned that the one old native who, as a young man, had helped to carry Yamamoto's body out of the jungle, had left the village two years previously to work in Kieta.

Another thirty minutes and we found a guide who had led the Japanese photographer in to the wreckage last year. He agreed to take us to the aircraft.



Above: The cortege arrives in Hibiya Park on June 5, 1943. There the funeral ceremony was conducted and three volleys were fired. In the background is the Tokyo Civic Centre (Atsushi Hirota). Below: The United Churches Mission memorial cross on Kahili airfield dedicated to all those that died fighting on Bourgainville, photographed by Bruce Adams.

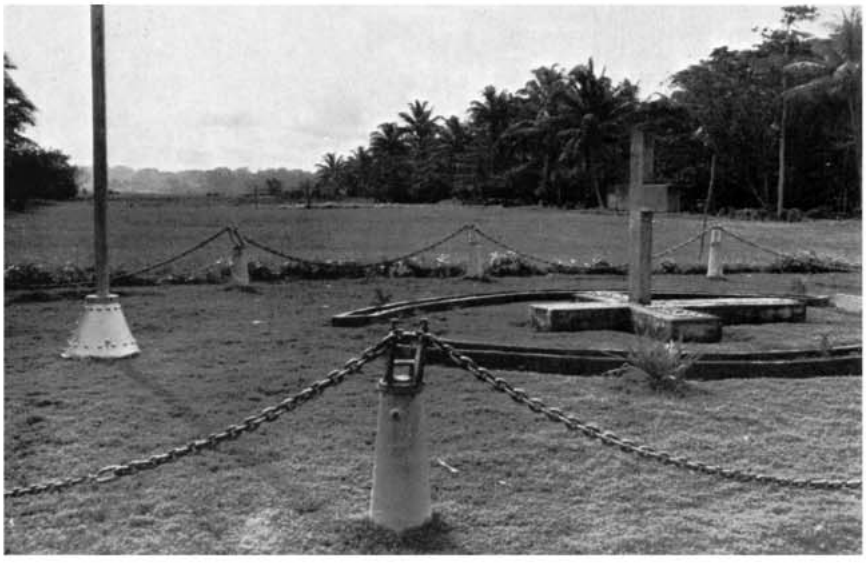
We climbed into the vehicle and drove off to the directions of the guide. Three-quarters of an hour later we stopped at a small bridge over a creek, left the vehicle and proceeded on foot. We were now confronted with what appeared to be an impregnable wall of tall trees and matted jungle vines.

We cut our way through with bush knives until we eventually came to a narrow, unused track. The guide informed us that the track had been used a long time ago when there had been a native village nearby.

For once the jungle was quiet, the only noise that could be heard was of the bushes brushing against our clothing as we stumbled through. We were saturated with sweat when we came to the first river crossing. The cool water was welcome and waist deep, we forged across. More walking, another river, another creek—so it went on for another two hours.

I turned the next corner of the track, and there it was. In a large clearing, covered with moss and vines, but still bearing the shape of an aircraft fuselage.

The front of the Betty was completely destroyed. One engine was burnt and charred. The fuselage and tail plane was practically in one piece. The jungle had started to reclaim what was left of the Betty bomber. Thick green moss was growing over many parts. Small trees and bushes were sprouting



through the gun turrets. I could hear lizards scampering across the floor of the fuselage—cobwebs were spread across most of the openings.

Dozens of bullet holes punctured the skin of the fuselage. Nearby on the ground, several feet from the wreckage were two seats. They had come from the centre of the plane, both still in one piece, but one with bullet holes in the back. From reports I had heard previously of Yamamoto's death, I wondered as I looked down if he had been sitting in this seat when the attack had occurred.

The tops of the trees around the Betty showed no signs of scars. They had grown back again over the years.

The ground was damp, soggy, and alive with small insects. The camouflage paint had peeled away during the years in the rain and heat of the jungle, but the metal had not rusted.

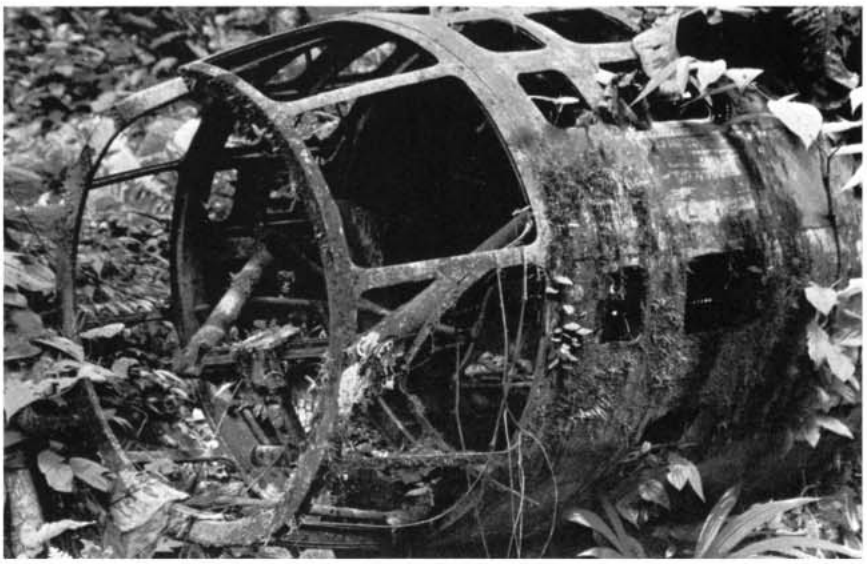
The late afternoon light was now filtering through the trees, the rays falling across the wreckage. The whole scene looked like one of violent death and disaster, of an important action that was now almost forgotten in the pages of the history of the Pacific War.

In time to come Admiral Yamamoto's plane will also disappear under the jungle growth and will fade into obscurity.

Admiral Yamamoto's body had been found on the evening of April 18 almost complete, still sitting on his seat in the aircraft. It was taken to Buin Farm quite near the HQ of 1st Base Operations and cremated on April 21.

On June 5, 1943, a great state funeral ceremony took place in Tokyo. At 8.50 a.m. the coffin covered with a white cross was transferred to a gun-carriage after having lain overnight in the main room of the Suiko-Sha Building. An hour later the cortege led by the Imperial Naval Band arrived at Hibiya Park where the ceremony was concluded by the Naval Minister with 1500 troops in attendance together with more than a hundred thousand civilians. Three volleys were fired before the remains were conveyed to Tama Cemetery. What may surprise our Western readers is that the remains were divided, part being buried at Tama and part returned to his ancestral grave at Chuko-Ji Temple, Nagaoka City. Our Japanese researcher Atsushi Hirota explained to the editor that in special cases, or having been requested by the deceased, remains are divided in Japan, one part to be buried in a convenient cemetery for the public to visit and the other to the ancestral grave.

The site of the house where he was born in Nagaoka, is today a small children's memorial park.



After his strenuous trek through the jungle, Bruce Adams brought these pictures back of the 'Betty' bomber. Above: The rear turret covered with moss and jungle vines. Centre: A bullet-holed seat from the aircraft found nearby; possibly that in which Admiral Yamamoto was sitting.

Below: Admiral Yamamoto's typical Japanese style grave in Tama Cemetery and, photo right, a close up of the inscription on the stone which reads: 'Admiral of the Fleet, Yamamoto Isoruku' (Atsushi Hirota).